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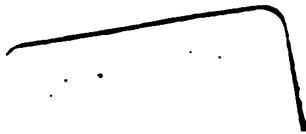




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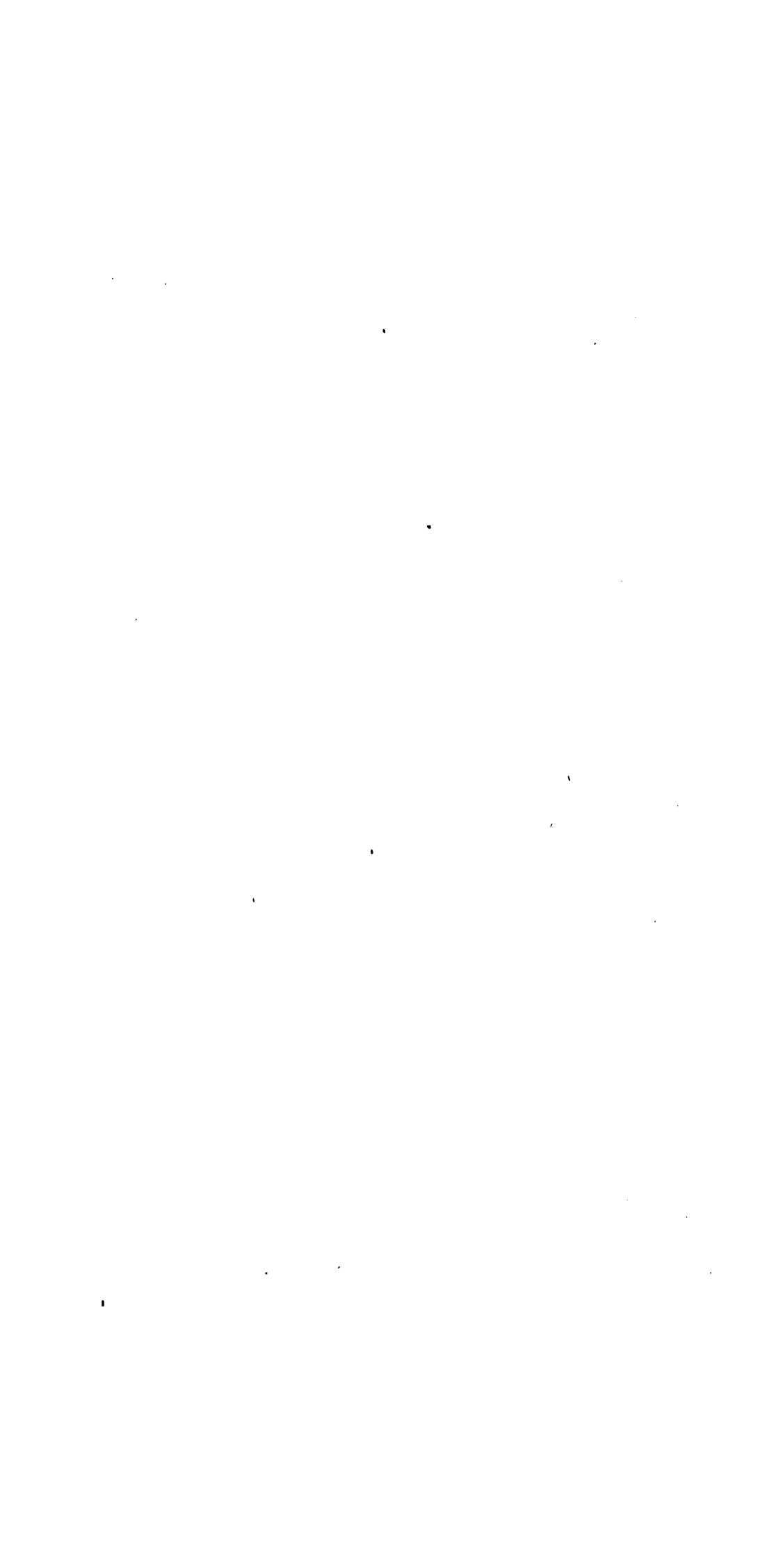
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TO THE  
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THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED  
BY THEIR FAITHFUL FRIEND AND PASTOR  
AS A MEMORIAL  
OF HIS MINISTRY AMONGST THEM  
AS A RECORD OF HIS THANKFULNESS TO HIM  
WHO INCLINED THEM TO HEAR THE WORD WITH AFFECTION  
AND  
AS AN EVIDENCE OF HIS CONTINUED DESIRE  
TO PROMOTE THEIR SPIRITUAL WELFARE.



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# SERMON I.

A GODLY DISPOSITION NECESSARY TO THE  
HEARING OF THE WORD.



JOHN VIII. 47.

*He that is of God, heareth God's words; ye therefore  
hear them not, because ye are not of God.*

THE words of God, here spoken of by our Saviour, are his message of pardon and reconciliation, conveyed to mankind in the Gospel. To hear them, is not merely to receive their sound with the outward ears; but to listen to them with respect; to receive them with meekness; and to embrace them with cordial affection: and to do this, our blessed Lord declares, is the characteristic and privilege of those who are of God; whereas not to hear them, is the mark and misery of those who are not of God.

If there be any words which pretend to be God's words, two duties, of infinite importance to us all, arise out of that fact; first, to hear, that is, to believe and embrace them, upon sufficient evidence of their authenticity; and, secondly, to submit ourselves implicitly to their authority and direction, as to our sentiments, our practice, and our hopes. With respect to the first of these duties, it is evident, that if the words, which we are called upon to hear, be in truth the words of God, it is a question of life and death eternal, whether we hear them or not. God speaks not in vain: the very circumstance of his speaking obliges us to pay attention to what he says; and the not attending to it is a sin, as well as the rejecting, or disobeying of his commands, when they have been heard and understood. It becomes, therefore, a point of the greatest interest and importance to us, to have a right understanding of our Saviour's declaration, *He that is of God, heareth God's words.*

Now it is plain, that the expression, *to be of God,* means, to be of the children of God: not indeed as having received Jesus Christ, and believed on his name, and having so been adopted into all the privileges of sonship; but his children in disposition; endued by his Spirit with a certain



degree of heavenly affection; inclined to learn his law, and to perform his will. On the other hand, they, who remain willingly subject to all the force of their natural corruption, and are the unresisting slaves of sin, are said by St. John, in his first Epistle, to be *of the devil*. *He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning—whosoever is born of God, doth not commit sin—whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.*<sup>1</sup> So our Lord himself reproached the unbelieving Jews; *Ye are of your father the devil; and the lusts of your father ye will do.*<sup>2</sup> Whereas they, who were of God, strove to do the will of God; and were qualified and disposed to hear those words, which the others could not receive, because they were not of God, but of the devil; and wilful transgressors, like him, of the divine law.

This appears to me to be a more natural and probable interpretation of our Saviour's expression, than to refer the words, *He that is of God*, to him that is regenerated, and made the child of God by the Holy Spirit; and for this obvious reason, that in the case of those, to whom our Saviour spoke, such regeneration could not take

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 8, 9, 10.

<sup>2</sup> John viii. 44.

place, till *after* the hearing, the effectual hearing of the Word. Let us then advert to the consequences to be inferred from the truth asserted in the text; that a godly disposition, or, if I may so describe it, a disposition towards God, is necessary to the right hearing of his Word; an indispensable preliminary to the reception of a true faith. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness;*<sup>3</sup> and before it can so believe, as to obtain the righteousness which is by Christ, it must be *disposed* towards such a belief. But if there be one truth more certain than another, it is, that the heart cannot effectually so dispose *itself*; for it *is deceitful above all things,*<sup>4</sup> and so far gone from its original perfection, as to render hopeless any attempt, fully to illuminate, or thoroughly to purify it, by the natural force of reason and conscience. Man's spiritual resemblance to the attributes of God, (conformable to which is the revelation of those attributes,) has been so impaired by the fall, that he is no longer naturally drawn, by an inherent principle of attraction, to divine truth; but rather has an involuntary dislike and fear of that knowledge, which is to convince him of his own

<sup>3</sup> Rom. x. 10.<sup>4</sup> Jer. xvii. 9.

sinfulness and danger ; and which lays upon him duties and constraints, at variance with his habits and affections. By his nature, degenerated as it is from its primitive integrity and perfection, he is not a child of God in feeling or practice ; yet our Saviour says, that he must be *of God*, in order to hear his word. What conclusion then remains to be drawn, but that this is the work of God himself? He reveals his will and purposes to mankind : He requires all men to take notice of that revelation, and to lay it to heart : but they are not of themselves thoroughly disposed so to receive his words, although they may perhaps make an effort to attend to them. He therefore himself, in order that his revelation may be effectual, and his work complete, influences their hearts, by the power of his Spirit, to a favourable and cordial reception of his Word ; and then the work goes on with the promise of a blessed result.

This doctrine, so important to man, as the object of a divine revelation, was upon other occasions laid down by our Saviour, with greater emphasis and distinctness of expression. When the Jews murmured at a saying, which was too spiritual for their comprehension, he said, *Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to*

*me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*<sup>5</sup> St. Paul declares that the faith, through which we are saved by grace, is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.<sup>6</sup> With respect to those moral dispositions of the heart, which are absolutely necessary to a right understanding, as well as to a practical exemplification of the Word of God, our Saviour's expression is very remarkable; *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;*<sup>7</sup> from which it appears, that, in order to form a right judgment of the evidences of revelation, a man must be sincerely desirous of doing the will of God, and of resigning himself implicitly to his direction. But such a desire, pure and efficacious, is not a natural desire of the human heart; and must therefore be infused into it by Him, who alone can regulate, as well as read, the thoughts and inclinations of the inner man: *No man can come unto me, said our Lord, except it were given unto him of my Father.*<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> John vi. 43.<sup>6</sup> Eph. ii. 3.<sup>7</sup> John vii. 17.<sup>8</sup> John vi. 65.

From all these declarations of Him, who knew the counsels of God, and the method of his dealings with men, we may infer, that to be of God, to be drawn of God, to be willing to do the will of God, are, as to the effect implied, equivalent expressions;<sup>9</sup> and that all, who are rightly and effectually disposed to receive and embrace the doctrine of Jesus, are so, not by nature, not by reason only, not by reflection, not by the tendencies of the heart, but by the grace of God's Holy Spirit. A striking instance of this truth is recorded in the case of Lydia. She had beforetime worshipped God in sincerity: but when Paul preached the Gospel, it was not her understanding, which, by its own natural light, enabled her all at once to discern the truth; but *the Lord opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul;*<sup>10</sup> inclined her to hear, and enabled her to examine with sincerity, the new doctrines which were then proposed for her acceptance. On the contrary, an insensibility to the convincing evidences, and sublime revelations of the Gospel, is ascribed, in Scripture, to that desperate and reckless hardness of heart, which has never been softened

<sup>9</sup> See Sherlock's Sermons, Vol. II. p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Acts xvi. 14.

by the influences of the Holy Spirit; that Spirit to which probably it has *done despite*. *If our Gospel be hid*, says St. Paul, *it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*<sup>11</sup>

The predisposing then of the heart, to hear the words of God, is the work of the Holy Spirit himself, by whose inspiration the words were originally spoken. But the Spirit does not *compel* assent to the evidences of Christianity, nor obedience to its precepts. It removes or diminishes those obstacles of natural corruption and infirmity, which prevent a meek and candid investigation of divine truth; turns the mind towards the contemplation of God's word and will; assists it, in overcoming the pride of reason, and the prejudices of an erring wisdom; and, when the Gospel is at length embraced with the full assent of the heart and understanding, imparts a strength, sufficient for the ends of obedience.

The heart of Lydia was opened by grace, not in the first instance to believe in Jesus Christ; but to *attend to the words that were spoken*

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 3.

*by Paul.* If those words had been found unreasonable, inconsistent with the known attributes of God, she would probably have rejected them; and that too by the aid of the Spirit, which can never lead to an acquiescence in error.<sup>12</sup> The Holy Spirit, therefore, incites and prepares the mind to exercise a sound and unbiassed judgment on the doctrines proposed for its acceptance; and when they *are* accepted, as of divine authority, then we have further to look to him for the grace of obedience, that is, for the desire and the ability to obey.

Upon subjects, which concern our spiritual relation to God, I know how dangerous it is, to trust to what is called experience; and how apt our feelings are to deceive us. But I may appeal to every one, who has been brought, from a state of carelessness and indifference, to a real knowledge of Gospel truth, a convincing, comforting, sanctifying knowledge, whether the change in his habits of thought, and principles of action, be not so great; his convictions of the nature and necessity of religious wisdom so different from his former sentiments, so opposed to what once appeared to be the natural

<sup>12</sup> See Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles, p. 169.

and resistless current of his thoughts and wishes, that nothing *could* have effected such a change, but the influence of the Spirit of God himself, first predisposing him to think seriously of such things, and then enabling him to make them his rule of action. And yet it was not a sudden, constraining force, which brought him, all at once, to a right sense of spiritual things; but a gentle impulse, the different periods and gradations of which cannot perhaps be distinctly traced, urging, seconding, and crowning his endeavours; not overpowering, but preventing and cooperating with his will.

This doctrine, be it reasonable or not, is clearly asserted in Scripture; but it *is* in fact reasonable, because it is altogether consistent with the experience which we have of our own defects and infirmities; and full of consolation to him, who has been made to feel the helplessness of his natural state. But there is a difficulty which arises from it, of too serious a nature to be overlooked.

If not only the ability to do the will of God, but also the very desire of learning it, must come from God himself, of what use are any efforts of our own? or what praise is there in *believing* or *obeying*?



Now considering mankind as being by nature *dead in trespasses and sins*, two things appear necessary, in order to lift them out of that depth of misery and helplessness; first, an authoritative declaration that God has pardoned their sinfulness; and, secondly, the power of applying that declaration to themselves, and making its assurances their own. That declaration is made in the Gospel; and it is accompanied with an invitation to all, without exception, to hearken to it, and to find in it rest for their souls. The fountain of living waters is set open, and all are invited to take of them freely. But that, which God invites and intreats all men to do, he will certainly enable them to do: and it is therefore manifest, that whosoever has heard the message of peace in the Gospel, has also received the power of attending to it, whatever use he may have made of that power. As for those, who are actually members of Christ's Church, I consider it certain, that every person, in covenant with God, has grace enough given him, to incline him to pray for more. But the grace, so given, may be rejected, or resisted, or not improved: for although it is *sufficient*, it is not *irresistible*. Those persons, who are spoken of in Scripture

as *resisting* the Spirit of God, can resist him only when he is present. That he comes to us in different degrees, according as we improve the opportunities which he affords, and that he abides with us, and in us, according as we strive to retain him, is evident from the different expressions used by the Apostles, of *growing in grace*,<sup>13</sup> *abounding more and more*,<sup>14</sup> *adding one virtue to another*.<sup>15</sup>

We conclude, therefore, that God gives to all his servants what may be termed an initial, or inceptive grace, a seminal principle of good, enabling them to turn to him, and seek for a more abundant supply: and so larger and larger measures are successively vouchsafed to them, who use and improve what has already been imparted to them, till they possess that degree of knowledge and strength, which is sufficient for the ends of their calling: whereas the neglect and non-improvement of spiritual aid and influence, are the causes of their being at length wholly withdrawn. Such appears to be the meaning of our Saviour's words, when, speaking of the spiritual privileges belonging to the children of God, he said, *Whosoever*

<sup>13</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 18.<sup>14</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 1.<sup>15</sup> 2 Pet. i. 5.

*hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.*<sup>16</sup>

As an illustration of this truth, it may be observed, that we are as much at liberty to use, or to neglect the spiritual strength imparted to the soul, as we are free to exercise, or not, the natural strength of the body. In either case God is the giver: the improvement of the gift rests with ourselves; although it be not effected solely *by* ourselves. In this view of the subject we have abundant grounds of mingled confidence and fear: of confidence, that we shall not fail, in our endeavours to obtain a saving knowledge of religious truth, for want of spiritual assistance: of fear, lest we should *neglect the gift that is in us*, and impute our ignorance and failings to the want of sufficient strength, when in fact they are owing to our inobservance and disregard of a divine principle within us. *Work out your salvation*, says St. Paul to the Philippians, *with fear and trembling; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*; <sup>17</sup> tremble therefore, and fear, lest your own exertions, your own improvement of the

<sup>16</sup> Matt. xiii. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Phil. ii. 12, 13. See Bishop Sherlock's Discourse on this text, Vol. II. p. 63.

will and power which he has already given you, should be so inadequate and imperfect, as to occasion him to withdraw his preventing and assisting grace, and to take from you even that which you have.

These explanations will fully open to us the meaning of our Saviour's declaration in the text, *He that is of God heareth God's words*. He who has received from God that preventing grace, which he bestows upon all whom he desires to be saved; who knows and remembers that he has received it, and the purposes for which it was given; who feels the beginnings of a religious sentiment and disposition, but feels also the power of sin, and the weakness of his own nature, and the necessity of further supplies of an enlightening and invigorating principle from the source of all light and strength; who seeks, by earnest prayer and *groanings that cannot be uttered*, for a nearer and more undoubted familiarity with the Spirit of sanctification; and has recourse to the word of that Spirit for information respecting the things which concern his peace—such an one *heareth God's words*; hears them with his heart; receives and embraces them with implicit belief, and follows them with a spirit of cheerful and devoted obedience.

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As a hearty desire to make the best improvement we can of the knowledge and strength which God has given us, will secure to us a larger and more effectual measure of the influences of his Holy Spirit, enabling us more clearly and satisfactorily to discern spiritual things, and opening the eyes of our understanding to the glories and comforts of the Gospel; so a careless, unimproving state of mind, and still more a habit of sensual indulgence, disincline a man from inquiring after the great truths of religion, and disqualify him from judging rightly of its evidences. He who has thus laid himself under a moral inaptitude and incapacity, has forfeited all claim to the interference of that Holy Spirit, who leads the earnest and sincere inquirer gently by the hand into the precincts of divine truth; and acts as an assessor and informer of the reason, a paraclete or advocate of the soul, when it is required to judge of the authority, and to submit to the obligations of the Gospel.

He, therefore, who denies the truth of that Gospel, without having obtained these qualifications of serious intention, humility of spirit, and purity of heart, is no competent judge of the question. *The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness*

*unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*<sup>18</sup> Without the aid of the Spirit he is not qualified to understand, or appreciate them; for many of those things are above and beyond his natural reason, and many more are opposed to his natural inclinations: *every one that doeth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds be reprov'd.*<sup>19</sup> The unbelief and opposition of profane, or sensual, or worldly men, is no argument against the truth of the Gospel; but rather, it may be thought, a presumption in its favour; for that, which is too strict and holy to be embraced by a carnal or a careless mind, carries upon it, at least, the stamp of resemblance to the attributes of Him, who *is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.*

Watch the unbeliever in his life: see whether his practices be consistent with those principles of action, which even natural religion suggests: observe, whether a regard for the honour of his Maker, and a desire to do his will, characterize every part of his conduct; whether he labour to *purify himself even as God is pure*, and to *do good unto all men*, even as God has been gracious and merciful towards

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 14.

<sup>19</sup> John iii. 20.

*him.* If not; if, on the contrary, his habits of speech and action be as opposite to the most abstract and universal principles of religion, as they are to the express commands and peculiar revelations of the Gospel; if selfishness, or sensuality, or vanity, or self-conceit and uncharitableness; if a disregard of social and domestic duties, and a contemptuous, or indecent mode of treating all religious questions, be almost universally characteristic of the unbeliever; then may you safely disregard his judgment, and set him aside, as one who has *quenched the Spirit* within him; and appeal to the opinion of the more serious, modest, and humble of mankind.

But the most important inference, which follows from the words of our Saviour in the text, still remains to be enforced. What are the signs and marks of those who *hear the words of God?* who so hear them, as to apply them to the ends of their own salvation? The very same signs and marks, which denote them to be children of God; the symptoms which indicate a love of God as their father; an earnest striving to come unto him; the reaching forth of the spirit to meet his Spirit, and to be drawn by it to a nearer, and more convincing, and more practical

view of Gospel truth: *And this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.*<sup>20</sup> He, therefore, who lives an unholy, or a careless, and unprofitable life, who does not manifest, in his conduct, the workings of *an honest and good heart*, has not yet heard the words of God, as they must be heard by those who desire to find them the words of everlasting salvation.

The conclusion to be drawn from this reasoning, is evident. We must all come unto God in his Word, if we would be saved: but we cannot so come unto him, unless we be drawn of him; and if we are so drawn of him, we shall be *doers of the Word, and not hearers only*. Let us, therefore, as the first and most indispensable step towards all religious knowledge, and all spiritual strength, seek to be thoroughly convinced of our own inability and unworthiness. Let us lament our insensibility to divine truth, and long for a more perfect instruction in the way of godliness, turning to God, and saying, *Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth*. Let us endeavour to discern within our hearts those first movements of grace, which manifest themselves in secret misgivings of conscience, holy thoughts, and anxious musings upon things eternal. Let

<sup>20</sup> 1 John v. 3.



us carefully improve them, and earnestly pray, that they may be enlarged and multiplied within us. Let us remember, that during the whole process of illumination God worketh in us, and with us. But if it be so, our works will be consistent with our wishes; we shall not, while we pray for grace, give way unresistingly to sin; nor mingle without reserve in that world, out of which we have been *called*, and are seeking to be *chosen*. It is only by the diligent improvement of the strength which God has given us, and by the diligent use of those means which he has appointed for our obtaining more, that we can emancipate ourselves from the thralldom of a practical unbelief; such an unbelief as, we fear, possesses the hearts of thousands who live in the outward profession of the Gospel.

Thus may we arrive through many stages and gradations of spiritual light and strength, at the fulness of religious conviction, and an experimental knowledge of Gospel truth; *being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering, with joyfulness.*<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Col. i. 10, 11.

## SERMON II.

INFIDELITY CAUSED BY IGNORANCE AND  
UNGODLINESS.

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1 TIMOTHY I. 19.

*Holding faith and a good conscience: which some having  
put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck.*

THE persons, against whose errors St. Paul cautions his young disciple, are said, in the next verse, to be Hymenæus and Alexander, *whom, says the Apostle, I have delivered to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.* We learn from the second Epistle to Timothy, that Hymenæus overthrew the faith of others, when he had made shipwreck of his own, by calling in question the resurrection of the dead. It appears then, that while he professed to be a Christian, he rejected the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, and was no better than a Sadducee. Of these miserable men the Apostle says, that

*concerning faith* they had *made shipwreck*; a very descriptive expression, whether we refer it to the breaking up of their Christian belief, or to that entire dissolution of the moral system, that utter destruction of principle, which usually mark the rejection, or abandonment of the truth as it is in Jesus. But if it be true, that a dissolution of the moral system is a necessary *consequence* of the want of a true religious faith, it is also true, that a deficiency of moral principle is often the cause, as well as the effect of unbelief and apostasy. Those who concerning faith made shipwreck, had *first put away a good conscience*.

An evil conscience frequently lies at the root of infidelity. One of the strongest inducements to disbelieve a divine revelation, is the consciousness that we have already incurred the penalties which it denounces against sin. The love of present indulgence, the horror of future retribution, plead vehemently against the plainest and most forcible arguments of reason. It cannot be doubted, but that many persons are deterred from thinking seriously about religion, by an apprehension of the restraints which, if laid to heart, it would impose upon their appetites or ambition; and that many persons fall away from the Christian faith, not through any deliberate

conviction of its falsehood, but from an unconquerable habit of disobedience to its precepts. Besides those vicious propensities, which rise up in rebellion against the law of holiness, and prompt mankind to wish that it were not binding upon them, a natural consequence of the continued violation, or disregard of any law, is a doubt, or denial of its authority. And perhaps it is the constant resistance, which is made by the flesh to the claims of a spiritual religion, and the consequent disinclination to a full and firm belief, which render faith so eminent a Christian virtue ; a true faith being absolutely inconsistent with an ungodly life. As the Gospel is attractive to the sincere and humble soul, so is it repulsive to the sensualist and the worldly-minded. The one will be predisposed to receive, the other to reject it ; and seldom, if ever, does it happen, that a young person institutes his first inquiries in the great question of religion, with a heart perfectly unoccupied, and a judgment wholly unbiassed. In almost every case, he has contracted some habits, both of thought and action, which are either favourable, or adverse, to his reception of religious truth.

The conscientious and reflecting man, who is convinced that there is a God, and is anxious to

discover his will; who feels his own infirmities, and laments his own inability to repair them, will embrace with eagerness the consolatory doctrines of the Gospel, and submit with cheerfulness to its restraints; while another, whose youth has been left, unguarded and unrestrained, to the free indulgence of passion and appetite, listens to the pleadings of a powerful advocate within, against the truth and authority of religion. The young are much sooner qualified to taste the seductive pleasures of the world, than they are to comprehend the obligations, or to value the promises of the Gospel. I acknowledge that this is too often the fault of education: but so it is; the passions are earlier matured than the reason; and the world is a more present and tangible object of regard, than *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*. However we may account for it, the fact is undeniable, that religious inquiry is seldom taken in hand, till the moral character is in a great degree formed.

Another disadvantage, under which Christianity labours, when it first becomes a subject of serious consideration, is this. There is a sort of current phraseology on matters of religion, to which children are accustomed from their earliest years; which they soon learn by rote, and fix in their

memory; but which does not always find its way to their heart. This is the case, when parents content themselves with merely teaching their children verbal articles of faith, and established formularies of devotion, without taking pains to elucidate their meaning, to establish their authority, or to enforce them by their own practice; and without directing their attention to the sacred oracles of truth, or to the source of grace and strength. Young persons, so educated, will be too likely to grow up mere formalists; and two pernicious consequences will ensue from the want of a solid foundation to their faith. They have been accustomed to consider themselves as possessed of religion; yet they do not find that it enables them to withstand temptation; nor, when they have sinned, does it excite a lively remorse and repentance in their minds: they soon come, therefore, to consider it as an inefficacious principle. Then, in the next place, when they hear the truth of the Christian religion assailed with objections, however trite and captious, they are surprised to find themselves wholly unable to answer them: and instead of being excited by their doubts to institute a more exact inquiry, they conclude at once, that the objections are unanswerable; and readily embrace

a system of unbelief, which is as acceptable to their passions, as it is convincing to their ignorance.

These considerations may serve to shew, by what process it not unfrequently happens, that a person, highly gifted by his Maker with powers both to investigate and to illustrate divine truth, may yet, in his intellectual career, pass through the intermediate stages of religious indifference and doubt, to a state of fixed and hardened unbelief. Religion, as I observed, if his attention was at all directed to it in his early years, has been with him a mere matter of custom and routine, a compliance with established terms and forms; while all the powers and energies of his mind were exerted in the acquisition of knowledge, commonly so called, or in the boundless fields of imagination, from which a rich harvest of worldly reputation is to be reaped. How easy and natural a process it is, for such a person, first to undervalue the importance of religion, of which he has never felt the comfort, nor the grace; and, when it interferes with passion, and imposes an irksome restraint upon nature, to begin to doubt its authority; to embrace with eagerness the most obvious and popular objections, and to take his stand even on a

single difficulty, against a system, which uncompromisingly asserts the duty of spiritual holiness, and the certainty of God's retributive justice.

Such instances, when unhappily they occur, furnish no valid argument against Christianity, in behalf of infidelity, or atheism; because it is obvious, that those very powers of mind, which are by misdirection dedicated to the service of sin, and are retained by the passions, as advocates in the cause of unbelief, if they had been devoted, with sincerity and singleness of heart, to the investigation of a rule of life, might have perceived the force of those proofs, and the importance of those restraints which now they proudly deny and reject.

Such instances, I repeat, afford no substantial argument against the truth of the Gospel. This point is urged, because although, in fact, the reception, or the rejection of truth by other men, as it makes no difference in its intrinsic claims, ought to make no difference in *our* disposition towards it; yet there is a natural inclination in almost all men, to defer to the authority of eminent talents, even in questions, of which they are themselves perfectly competent judges. But, if the evidences of Christianity are satisfactory to your own mind, it ought to be a matter of



absolute indifference to you, as far as its truth is concerned, who embraces, or who rejects it. You must indeed pity, and, if possible, persuade, those unhappy persons, who *make shipwreck of their faith*; but it were strange folly indeed for you, who have experienced the Gospel to be *full of grace and truth*, to suspect the stability of your own religious principles, because other men have built without a foundation; and to sacrifice your own comfort and hopes to the authority of a splendid name.

Again then I assert, that such instances of highly gifted infidelity, are no argument against the truth of our holy religion. But I will tell you what they are; and in that point of view I earnestly intreat you to consider them with seriousness and with fear. They are sad and signal instances of that perverseness of human nature, which converts to the purposes of evil the best and noblest gifts of God. They are striking proofs of the necessary connexion between a depraved heart and a moral blindness of the understanding; to which the Apostle alludes, when he says, that *some, having put away a good conscience, concerning faith have made shipwreck*. They teach us, that the finest talents, far from ascertaining any man's success

in his search after divine truth, may powerfully obstruct its reception, if they be previously engaged in the cause of libertinism and sensuality. Above all, they are awful warnings, which may serve to admonish us, that when man, proud and impious man, abuses, to the ends of sin, those faculties which the Almighty Source of Wisdom gave him for the instruction and improvement of mankind, he is oftentimes abandoned in judgment, to the misgovernment of his own perverted reason, and suffered to be tossed to and fro by every gust of passion, without consistency or respect in this world, and without hope in that which is to come. A more melancholy and awful spectacle can hardly be presented to the mind, than that of a reasonable being, made in the likeness of his Creator, for the purposes of God's glory and his own eternal happiness, misled by practical ungodliness, and wilful ignorance, into the mazes of unbelief; not only *forsaking God who made him, and lightly esteeming the rock of his salvation,*<sup>1</sup> but *treading underfoot the Son of God, and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace;*<sup>2</sup> not only neglecting the revealed will of God, but ridiculing and reviling it; not only indulging, without remorse, in every sinful

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxxii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. x. 29.

pleasure which the Gospel forbids ; but infusing the poison of immorality into the minds of others ; labouring to vitiate the source of public principle, to weaken all the ties of virtue, and to pave the way for infidelity and atheism, by familiarizing the minds of thousands to the profane and impure effusions of a perverted imagination and a corrupt heart ; to see him, deriding, with bitter sarcasms, the commerce of Christian society, and the softening intercourse of domestic life ; casting around him, as in sport, firebrands, arrows, and death ; and exulting in the moral destruction which he has wrought.

This is indeed a melancholy sight : but mark the result. The God, whom he insults, and affects to disbelieve, at length forsakes him, and gives him up to the hardness of an impenitent heart. Then conscience is utterly extinguished and put away ; the *light* that is in him becomes *darkness* ; he is precipitated, by a restless and insatiable love of sin, from one degree of wickedness to another ; his peace of mind destroyed ; and by degrees his bodily strength decayed ; the respect of all good men forfeited ; admiration succeeded by pity and contempt ; conversion seems to be hopeless, condemnation unavoidable ;

and at last, perhaps in the midst of his unholy and mischievous career, the decree of the Almighty goes forth, and the wretched man is suddenly taken away, to abide the coming of his eternal Judge.

This picture may perhaps seem to be highly coloured. We have even in our own time seen, in more than one instance, its horrors embodied in reality. It is not indeed in every case that infidelity runs the same career : there are many shades and varieties of wickedness, according to the tempers and opportunities of men ; but in its main feature, the almost inseparable connexion between unbelief and ungodliness, this delineation will be found generally applicable. I have described a remarkable case, in the hope that it may teach the younger of my hearers the following lessons ; in the first place, not to trust implicitly to their own reason and sagacity, in the most important of all questions, the truth or falsehood of the religion which they profess ; till they have satisfied themselves, that they are possessed of that qualification, so necessary to an impartial decision, *the answer of a good conscience towards God :*\* and yet, in the second place, not to be misled by the splendour of

\* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

extraordinary talent in others, to forsake the guidance of their own conscience and reason. Even if the authority of others ought in such a case to influence our belief, yet eminent ability, a fertile fancy, and a brilliant wit, are of themselves so far from qualifying a man to decide upon the evidences of revealed religion, that they may, and often do disqualify him for the task, when there is wanting the foundation of a humble and teachable mind, a sincere and earnest heart. We must *receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls.*<sup>4</sup>

If you would escape making *shipwreck of your faith*, endeavour not to *put away a good conscience*: avoid placing yourself in such a condition, as must of necessity lead you to wish that the Gospel were not true. The wish will soon be succeeded by the opinion; and when once you have begun to search for grounds of doubt, there will not be wanting the enemies of your salvation, to address abundance of arguments to your reason, through the medium of your inclinations and desires.

I am not now about to consider the grounds, upon which the religion of Jesus Christ asserts its right of dominion over the hearts and con-

<sup>4</sup> James i. 21.

sciences of men : but let me press one argument in its behalf. If God has ever been pleased to make a revelation to mankind, he has made it in the Gospel. *This* even the unbeliever must allow ; for no scheme of religion, which pretends to be a revelation, can bear a moment's comparison with the Gospel. Further, we know that the Gospel, when embraced with sincerity, is thoroughly effectual to the purposes of a holy life, and an assurance of acceptance with God ; that it communicates to the mind a serenity and peace which nothing else can give ; and opens a prospect of eternity which satisfies all our hopes and desires. Were there no other ground for our adherence to the faith of Christ crucified, yet these, with every prudent man, would be quite sufficient. What equivalent for these advantages is offered to us by the champions of infidelity ? What substitute for that *hope*, which we *have as an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast* ?<sup>5</sup> Is there any thing in their own conduct, in their lives, or in their death, which should tempt us to embrace their principles, and to abandon the religion in which we have been brought up ? A life of unrestrained excess ; a career of mischief ; a course of enervating debauchery ; a

<sup>5</sup> Heb. vi. 19.

premature old age, and an untimely death—in many cases inflicted by their own hands—these are the customary fruits of infidelity in this world: and in the next—let us not pass sentence upon those miserable sinners against their own souls; but hope, that if it be possible, the Lord may have mercy upon them, even for the sake of Him whom they have rejected and despised. And for ourselves, let us pray, that we may be kept stedfast in the faith, through the power of the Spirit of God. Let us say, I thank God that I am a Christian; that I am fixed in a religion, which, if it be true, secures my eternal happiness; and if not, is consistent with the dictates of my conscience and reason, and cannot be otherwise than pleasing to God. I am sure, that every sinful deed, and every unholy word and thought, must be offensive to him; and I perceive no way by which he can be satisfied, except that which is pointed out in the Gospel. As for those wretched men who deny that Gospel, if it be true, what remaineth for them but *a certain fearful looking for of judgment?* and if it be false, what are they profited? *As, therefore, I have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so will I walk in him;*<sup>6</sup> and again, I thank God,

<sup>6</sup> Col. ii. 6.

*that he hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace.*<sup>7</sup>

But I entreat you to remember, that, if you embrace Christianity at all, you must embrace it with sincerity and singleness of heart; with a firm purpose of submitting to its authority, of abiding by its precepts, of reposing upon its promises, of using its means of grace. If the Gospel be true at all, it is altogether true; if it have any authority, it has a paramount and supreme authority: our opinions and our practice must be entirely and implicitly formed according to its standard. Stedfastness in Christian principles admits of no inconsistency; no acting by various rules: there is one, and one only question which a Christian may conceive his Lawgiver and Redeemer to propose to him, when he is in doubt how to act; *What is written in the law? how readest thou?* If God himself, by his blessed Son, has marked out for us the way to heaven, there can be no other; and it is a plain and direct way; there are no by-paths nor private inlets, through which a man can creep in by stealth. There is one wedding garment in which all must be clothed who would be

<sup>7</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 16.



admitted into that holy place ; *into which there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth.*<sup>8</sup>

No proposition can be more undeniable than this, that whatever God has revealed, must be believed; and whatever he has commanded must be done; and we have the express testimony of his Word, that an intentional irregularity in any part of our conduct will vitiate the whole. *Who-soever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*<sup>9</sup> There is no sin whatever, which will not, if persisted in, be a rock of shipwreck to our faith and our hopes. Nothing will suffice for the purposes of our Christian calling, but a spirit of entire and uncompromising obedience to the law of Christ, founded upon a deep and constraining sense of his mercies towards us, and strengthened by the hope of that glorious reward which he has promised to his faithful followers.

Let me then, finally, my Christian friends, address you in the words of an Apostle, who, having once fallen away, recovered his steadfastness; and was strengthened, by the effectual grace of God, to persevere even unto the testimony of martyrdom: *Ye therefore, beloved,*

<sup>8</sup> Rev. xxi. 27.

<sup>9</sup> James ii. 10.

*seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness; but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: to him be glory, both now and for ever.*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 17.

## SERMON III.

THE MYSTERIOUSNESS OF SOME PARTS OF A DIVINE  
REVELATION NO GROUND OF OBJECTION.



MATT. XI. 27.

*No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he, to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.*

MANKIND have derived their knowledge of God from two sources; the works of nature, as it is called, by a consideration and comparison of which human reason is able to ascertain some of the attributes of that Creator, the belief of whose existence has been written by himself on the table of the heart; and, secondly, the direct revelations which the Deity has made of himself to man. It is extremely difficult to determine, to how great an extent any portion of mankind has been at any time exclusively indebted to

the former source for their knowledge of divine things. For if, as is highly probable, and as we believe certain, the Almighty made a revelation of himself to the earliest of the human race; it was not likely that the traces of that revelation should ever be so completely obliterated from the minds of succeeding generations, as to leave them to derive all their notions of a Supreme Being from their own reason alone. In fact, we find the notion of a Deity prevalent amongst nations in the lowest state of barbarism, whose reasoning faculties are far too inactive and uncultivated, to have travelled upward, through a long chain of inferences, to the grand conclusion, that there is a God; and far too unobservant, to have noticed those demonstrations of his attributes, which awaken and realize their innate notion of his existence. It is a knowledge which they have inherited from their first progenitors; the very perversion of which affords an argument in favour of its being traditional. So that, in reality, it is very doubtful, whether any thing like a *system* of natural religion would ever have existed, had there never been a direct revelation. Taking it, however, in the common acceptance of the terms, natural religion discloses to man the being and moral attributes

of a God, and nothing more. By reasoning upon the necessary connexion between cause and effect, we can discover the existence of a first great source of being; and it is plain that the Creator must possess in perfection all those excellencies, which his creatures enjoy, from him, in a limited degree; that he must be perfectly good, and powerful, and merciful, and just, and wise. But it is evident, that we can assign no attributes to the Deity, except those which we ourselves possess in kind; because we have no perception, or notion, of any other. And yet, since *God is in heaven and we on earth*; since he is a Spirit, and we are creatures of a nature which is mixed and circumscribed, he may, and undoubtedly *does*, possess other faculties and properties, of which, in our present state, we can have no conception.

This observation holds good, with regard, not only to the Deity, but also to the intermediate orders of beings between man and his Creator. A blind man, in the full enjoyment of all his other senses, has not only no accurate perception, but not the least notion of those ideas which are conveyed into the mind by the sense of vision. In like manner, it is easy to conceive, that beings of a superior order of intelligence may have many

objects of perception and enjoyment, to which *we* are strangers, for want of senses adapted to them. Thus the Supreme Being himself may possess, not only all the intellectual properties of his creatures in the highest perfection, but many others, which we are utterly unable to comprehend in the present limited state of our faculties. And to what degree, or in what manner, those properties will enter into and affect his moral government of the world, is a point, upon which natural religion cannot even form a conjecture. This is amongst *the secret things that belong unto the Lord our God*. We may safely conclude that all his purposes are good, and that all the measures of his providence are right: but when we proceed to consider the mode of his existence, the nature of his intellectual properties, we take in hand a subject which we have no faculties to grasp; we speak of a Being of infinite capacity in language, which was invented to represent the conceptions of a limited intelligence.

It is at this point that Revelation steps in, and discloses to mankind, not only the will of God, with respect to their conduct in this state of trial, but so much of his nature as he himself has seen fit to make known to them; so

much, we may conclude, as he deemed sufficient for the purpose of enlivening our devotion, of exercising our humility, of trying our faith, and, perhaps, of exciting our ardent desires after that more perfect state of being, where our nature will be exalted and purified, our senses extended and quickened, and our capacity of knowledge and happiness increased, in a manner, and to a degree, of which, at present, we have no conception. As creatures endowed with reason, whose highest privileges are the contemplation of our Maker, and the capacity of imitating his perfections, it is natural to conclude, that an improvement and exaltation of all our faculties, and an advancement in the scale of intellectual beings, are amongst those good things which are in store for the glorified spirits of the just.

This discussion may perhaps appear to be somewhat dry and speculative; but it involves a point of great practical importance: for it is indispensable to our religious character, that we should entertain a profound sense of the immeasurable difference which exists between our Creator's nature and our own; that we should be fully aware how presumptuous it is, to apply the scale of human probabilities to the counsels and operations of a Being, not only infinitely superior

to ourselves, but upon whose will those very probabilities depend. The folly and rashness of such a proceeding are strongly insisted upon by St. Paul, who justly observes, that what we actually know of the nature of God and his operations, has been revealed to us by God himself; and neither is, nor can be the result of mere human speculation, nor can be safely described in any other terms than those which have been dictated by the Spirit of God. Speaking of the hidden things which belong to the Deity, and which concern an essence so greatly superior to, and different from our own, he says, *God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man; but the Spirit of God:*<sup>1</sup> and our Saviour, in the words of the text, declares in the most explicit manner, *No man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him:* that is, no man, by the force of his natural reason, can arrive at any certain knowledge of the nature and proceedings of the Deity; but he must be content to be

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 10, 11.



indebted for that knowledge to revealed religion, in which God has disclosed to mankind so much respecting himself, and the economy of his providence, as he deemed sufficient for the purposes of a state of trial and preparation.<sup>3</sup>

It appears therefore to be a very unreasonable mode of proceeding, to examine the Word of revelation, with a preconceived resolution to reject every doctrine which shall transcend the grasp of human reason. The first point to be ascertained is, whether the Scriptures are, what they profess to be, the Word of God. Having settled this to our satisfaction, our next duty is, to read them with the best attention we can give to so important a study; *to search out the testimonies of the Lord*, with a view to discovering what we are required to believe concerning him, and what we are to practise; to take the words of Scripture in their plain and obvious sense; to compare its doctrines and precepts, in order that our interpretation of them may be consistent; to rest assured, that what we are unable to comprehend, must yet be true, if it is distinctly stated in the word of God; and not to guide ourselves by any such deceitful rule as this, that where mystery begins,

<sup>3</sup> See Butler's Analogy, Part II. ch. 3 & 4.

religion ends ; that whatever is not clear, need not be believed ; a rule by which no man thinks of guiding himself in any other branch of knowledge.

Men are very apt to mistake this rule for another, concerning which there is no question ; that nothing is necessary to be believed, but what is plainly revealed. It is a very different thing, to assert a truth, and to explain how it can be true. For instance ; the doctrine of a bodily resurrection is expressly asserted in the New Testament ; we therefore believe that the body will rise again ; but *how* it can be, is not explained, although St. Paul has in part illustrated the subject by analogy. The difficulties, which embarrass our conceptions of the mode of a bodily resurrection, are insuperable to human reason ; yet we are not on that account at liberty to doubt it. Now this is a matter, of which I should have known nothing, had it not been for Revelation. It is to me perfectly inconceivable, how this bodily frame should first moulder in dust ; then pass in succession through a countless variety of organized substances, and yet preserve its identity, and at the last be raised again, to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. Yet the Scriptures tell me it will be so ; and I acquiesce.

But are we not frequently required, upon other authority than that of Scripture, to assent to truths which we know to be such, and yet cannot tell *how* they can be? We know that the Almighty Creator formed this material world out of nothing; for if not, the materials, out of which it is made, must have subsisted independently of God; yet surely no proposition is less comprehensible to the human understanding, than that every thing was made out of nothing; or rather, that every thing was made to exist, where nothing was before.

It is the same with many of the phenomena of nature; we know that such and such things are; we can trace the effect of certain causes; but when we proceed to investigate the causes themselves, and *how* it is that they produce their effects, we always find that there is a point, where human reason must stop, and beyond which it discerns nothing; the great Cause of all has enveloped himself in darkness impenetrable to the eye of man: *Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel the Saviour.*<sup>3</sup> And if we find that this is uniformly the case in natural philosophy, why should we be offended, if, in the revelation of himself to mankind, the

<sup>3</sup> Isa. xlv. 15.

Deity should have disclosed to us some features of his providence, and some properties of his nature, undiscoverable to our reason, without explaining to us how, or why such things are, probably because our present limited faculties are inadequate to comprehend it?

If we accept the testimony of human reason to facts, which we are utterly at a loss to comprehend; ought we not much more readily to accept the testimony of the written word of God? Such seems to be the reasoning of St. John, when he observes, *If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God, which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.*<sup>4</sup>

The Gospel is in part a revelation of the will of God, as it concerns the moral duty of man, and in part a revelation of the divine nature and operations. In the former particular it is full, clear, and explicit; in the latter, as might reasonably be expected, it is somewhat obscure and mysterious. The great doctrines of a satisfaction

<sup>4</sup> 1 John v. 9, 10.

made for sin, of immortality, and of a future state of rewards and punishments, are set forth in the strongest light; yet the ways of God's dealings with mankind are not fully cleared up; the apparent inconsistencies of Providence are no further reconciled, than by a general reference to a future day of retribution; the doctrines of God's foreknowledge and man's free will are asserted; but the mode, in which they may consist with each other, is not explained; nor is the secret of the divine nature disclosed to us; probably because it surpasses the powers of a finite understanding.

With respect to the plan of redemption, we may indeed well exclaim with St. Paul, *great is the mystery of godliness: God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*<sup>5</sup> But was it to be expected, that the great work of man's redemption should be accomplished by means altogether comprehensible to human understanding? Was it not competent to its divine contriver and finisher, to choose his own method of conferring a signal benefit upon mankind; and, where the two parties concerned were, on the one hand

<sup>5</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.

the Deity himself, and on the other his fallen creatures, is it at all surprising that some parts of the covenant of grace should involve questions, which concern the divine nature, and transcend the intelligence of man? If in the chain of mercy, by which the Almighty draws a race of sinners to himself, the first links be far above, out of our sight, and others surrounded with a glory too bright for mortal gaze,—shall we, on that account, refuse to follow its attraction, and choose our own ways and methods of ascending into the presence of the Most High?

How unreasonable then is it to reject any doctrine which is revealed to us in the Christian Scriptures, only because we are unable to comprehend how it can be! The words may be plain and evident, where the doctrines which they contain are mysterious: and how much safer, and wiser, and more befitting our present condition it is, to conclude, that these truths are proposed by the Author of light, to prove our humility and ready acquiescence in his will; to become subservient to the ends of religion by exercising the obedience of our reason, and probably in other ways which at present we cannot perceive. It is not intended that we should know every thing in this present life; it is

not agreeable to our notions of a state of trial that we should. Many things we must at present take for granted, upon the authority of God's Word; nor is this any juster ground of complaint than it is that a child is less acquainted with the reasons of things than one of maturer age; or that one man should have a deeper insight into the secrets of nature than another. That man acts most agreeably to his character of an imperfect and erring creature, placed in a state of discipline, who first satisfies himself that the Scriptures are indeed, what they profess to be, the Word of God; and then takes in hand the sacred volume of truth with a humble and teachable mind, prepared to believe all that is therein stated, because he finds it there; and to practise all that is therein commanded, because he there discovers the sure will of God, and the motives to obedience. This it is, *to receive with meekness the engrafted word.*

To apply these remarks to the great and fundamental doctrine of the Trinity, a word invented by divines, to express the distinction of the three persons in the unity of the Godhead—we maintain, that God is represented to us in his Word, as existing in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; yet that these

three, as far as the substance of the Deity is concerned, are one.

So plainly is this doctrine affirmed in the Scriptures, that it cannot be blotted out, but by blotting out large portions of the Scriptures themselves. It is therefore proposed for our belief; for whatsoever God declares in his Word must be believed: otherwise his veracity is impeached, and our faith is imperfect. When a question arises concerning a doctrine of revealed religion, we ask, in the first place; Is this book, the Bible, that which it professes to be, the very Word of God? That being answered in the affirmative, the next question is, What does this book declare concerning the nature and operations of God? for we know, that as this is the only rule by which our faith and practice are to be regulated, whatsoever he therein requires us to do, we must do with a cheerful and entire obedience; and whatsoever he propounds for our belief, we must believe with humility and meekness. But we find some doctrines on the surface of these writings, which we are unable to comprehend: not *contrary* to our reason, but *above* it. With what feeling ought we to be inspired? With doubt and unbelief? No surely, but with an awful sense of Him, *whose thoughts*



*are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.* May we not conclude, that these truths are purposely set forth, as exercises of our faith and piety? Why should not God require of us, as well that we should beat down and subdue the pride of reason, that disease of the soul which brought sin and death into the world, as that we should mortify the evil inclinations of the body?

It may perhaps be objected, that this course of argument tends to disparage and degrade the authority of that reason, which has been implanted in us by our Creator for the purpose of investigating truth; that it limits its range to subjects comparatively unimportant, and imposes restraints upon it in the most interesting of all inquiries; and that there are no sufficient grounds for circumscribing its province in questions of a religious kind, while it is left to expatiate uncontrolled in the boundless regions of philosophy. To this we reply, that the office of reason is of a twofold kind; it is either primary and absolute, as in determining by induction the principles of natural philosophy,<sup>6</sup> and laying the very foundations of knowledge; or it is secondary and respective, as in questions

<sup>6</sup> Bacon, de Augm. Scient. IX. 1. p. 251.

concerning revealed religion, where the revelation itself being once admitted, the propositions it contains are self-subsistent, and independent of the decrees of human reason. Its office, in this case, is only to form its inferences from the propositions themselves, the truth of which rests upon the determination of one simple question, whether they are contained in Scripture.

Under these impressions, the pious inquirer after truth finds no difficulty in making his election, when the following alternative presents itself. You must either take the Bible as it is, and interpret it according to the established and universal laws of criticism, giving to words their plain and customary signification; in which case your assent will be required to doctrines of a high and mysterious nature; or, if you are determined to admit no doctrine, which shall be above the level of your comprehension, you must reject some parts of the Christian canon, and alter others, and interpret many more in a manner altogether at variance with the acknowledged rules of interpretation. But this branch of the alternative, to one who considers the source and nature of a divine relation, will involve incomparably greater difficulties than the other.

Those who reject all that is incomprehensible (to themselves) in Revelation, are still forced to believe much, concerning the Deity himself, which in point of fact they neither do, nor can understand. To mention only one point, which indeed concerns all the divine attributes, it is quite certain, notwithstanding the definitions which the most eminent philosophers have given, that the human mind can form no idea of infinity; it has no conception of anything so vast as to admit of no addition, any more than it has a conception of anything so small as to admit of no diminution.

Here then we may leave the question. We acknowledge that the Scriptures contain the assertion of certain truths, the essence and mode of which surpass our present limited comprehension. But when once we are assured that those Scriptures are indeed, what they profess to be, a revelation from God; this, to a reasonable being, constitutes no objection. Amongst other promises contained in that book of Revelation, he finds the assurance of a time to come, when he will know even as he also is known.<sup>7</sup>

Satisfied that God is able to reconcile his seeming contradictions, he confines himself within

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

the sphere, which is marked out for an imperfect being in a state of intellectual as well as moral discipline; he mortifies the pride of reason, as well as the violence of passion; he takes the doctrines of Scripture as he finds them, and endeavours to derive from them that comfort and support, which, when embraced with an honest singleness of heart, they never fail to impart. He is *wise*, not *in his own conceit*, but to the understanding and practice of godliness; and he is content to be ignorant of the rest, till he shall come to that place, where the spirits of the just made perfect shall behold the Lord face to face.

I am sensible that what has now been delivered is of a more abstruse and less interesting kind than what you are accustomed to hear from this place. It is not on that account the less important. It is intended for those, who are likely to encounter the difficulties which the pride of human reason throws in the way of faith. This is not the case with the poor and humbleminded Christian, who finds the language of Scripture too plain, and its doctrines too consolatory, to think of doubting, when he has learned to believe, and adore, and be thankful. In proportion as we can bring ourselves,

by lowly thoughts and recollection of sin, and prayer for grace, to that humble and teachable frame of mind, we shall experience the Gospel—the Gospel in all its integrity and sublimity—to be *the power of God unto salvation—the way and the truth*, as it is in Jesus, *through whom we have access by one Spirit unto the Father*; through the efficacy of whose redeeming blood, entitling us to the sanctifying influences of the Spirit, we hope to believe and live as becomes his disciples and servants, and to be found *meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Col. i. 12.

## SERMON IV.

THE HELP OF THE SPIRIT.



ROM. VIII. 26.

*Likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

If the Scripture contain no other declarations concerning the nature and agency of the Holy Spirit, and the part assigned to him in the work of man's redemption, the Christian would possess a rich treasure of knowledge and consolation in this chapter of St. Paul. The personality of the Spirit, his union with the Father and the Son, and at the same time his distinct office in the economy of the Christian covenant; his sanctifying efficacy, his strengthening energy, his comforting influence, are there spoken of by

the Apostle, in terms which are sufficient to confirm the doubtful, and to animate the fearful servant of Christ, if not to convince the unbeliever, or convert the ungodly; especially if we bear in mind, that it is not St. Paul, but the Spirit himself, who speaketh by St. Paul, bearing witness to his own attributes and powers. He is described, in this chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, as *the Spirit of God*, and *the Spirit of Christ*; as *the Spirit of life*, and *the Spirit of light*; as *the Spirit of adoption*, and *of holiness*; as *the Spirit of intercession*, and *of help*. And under all these characters he is spoken of as a *person*, (a term which in the defect of human language, when applied to the divine nature, we use as best fitted to express a distinct individual agency and manifestation of the Godhead;) and if there were no other text in Scripture, upon which to build the doctrine of his personality, it would stand immovably upon these; *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities—The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us—He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God.* Much more forcible is this evidence, when it is taken as a commentary upon those promises of Jesus

Christ to his Apostles, which announced the Holy Spirit as a Paraclete, an Advocate, or Comforter, as a Spirit of Truth, who should guide them into all truth; as a witness and a judge to convince and condemn the ungodly, as well as to enlighten and sanctify the elect.

*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities.* How signally was this truth exemplified at the first majestic advent of the Paraclete! which transformed the simple, timid, hesitating fishermen of Galilee, into the wise, and eloquent, and fearless preachers of the Gospel; which gave them boldness to speak the Word, and a wisdom superior to all the gifts or attainments of human genius and learning, which none of their adversaries were able to gainsay; before which the traditionary lore of the Scribe, and the subtle philosophy of the Grecian disputant, became as foolishness. In the case of those holy men, the help of the Spirit was signal, and unquestionable; and it was extraordinary. The strong arm of his power was visibly interposed to strengthen and uphold the pillars of Christ's Church, which would otherwise have tottered and fallen under a weight too great for human energies to bear, what time the storm fell upon them, "and the flood came and



beat against them." And the tokens of his help were, not only the lambent tongues of fire, and the gift of languages, and the signs and wonders wrought in the name of Jesus; but the rapid growth and progress of the Gospel, and the sanctity of those who professed it; and the provision made for the establishment and perpetuity of the visible Church of Christ: effects, to which the infirmity of human nature, with all the aids and appliances of human wisdom and ingenuity, would have been utterly inadequate.

But the office of the Spirit, in this respect, surely did not terminate with the first and most urgent necessities of the Church of Christ. If the dangers and difficulties, which beset its infancy, required the *miraculous* display of his protecting power, in order that all men might read, in characters distinctly traced by the Spirit, *this is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes;*<sup>1</sup> was that protecting power to be altogether withdrawn when the infancy of the Church was passed? The necessity of the case did not permit it. Although the Church, which was planted by the Apostles, was so firmly rooted in the world, by the power and testimony of the Holy Spirit, as to be secure from extirpation, it

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxviii. 23.

was not exempt from dangers, and calamities, and trials. Sin was still powerful in the nature of mankind, and in the world; the enemies of Christ still continued to be active, and to *bruise the heel* of Him who had crushed the head of the great adversary. The Church, therefore, required the continued support and aid of the Holy Spirit, in such manner as was suited to its necessities at different times; not always a special and miraculous infusion of his gifts, but always a constant and unfailing distribution of them to the several members of the Church, as each had need.

But more than this, the Spirit had been promised, an abiding and a sanctifying Spirit, even unto the end. When Peter assured the multitude, assembled on the day of Pentecost, that whosoever repented, and was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, should receive the Holy Ghost, he added, *For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off; even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*<sup>2</sup> The Spirit then, the Comforter, was not all at once withdrawn from the Church of Christ, when by his powerful agency its foundations had been securely laid. The work of edification, the building up of God's

<sup>2</sup> Acts ii. 39.

household, was still to be done; a great and arduous work; a work of ages; to which the piety and wisdom of the most pious, and the wisest, would have been utterly and for ever incompetent. The tempering and moulding of each constituent part; the cementing of the whole together in the bond of unity; the building up of the edifice according to the strict and unbending rule of faith; the diffusion through the whole of the principle of evangelical harmony and holiness—this surely was a work, surpassing human wisdom to devise, and human strength to accomplish; a work, worthy of the continued superintendence and aid of Him, who had commenced it in the mighty demonstrations of his power.

Although by his meritorious obedience, and death upon the cross, the Son of God purchased universal redemption for mankind, and placed them in a capacity to be saved; so that all, who should repent and believe in him, were to be translated from a state in which they were subject to the wrath of God, to one in which they are the objects of his favour; yet the nature itself of man was not thereby changed. Its inherent and inherited corruption still remained; for, as our Article expresses it, “this infection of nature doth remain, yea, in them that are

regenerated." The act of faith, by which a believer applies to himself the benefits, or privileges, purchased for him by the death of Christ, does not *of itself* purify the soul, nor do away the taint of sin; but it enables the soul to receive those gifts and graces of the Spirit of sanctification, which in its natural state it could neither receive, nor effectually desire. Thus the atonement which was made by a crucified Redeemer, far from rendering unnecessary the intervention of the Holy Spirit, did in effect render it indispensable to all believers; because it rendered it available to them. *But* for that atonement, they would have been incapable of spiritual gifts; by it they are made fit to be a habitation and temple of the Holy Ghost.

It is to be feared, that this important distinction is not sufficiently understood by the generality of Christian professors: that they are not sufficiently alive to the peculiar office, which the Holy Spirit performs in the work of man's salvation, after the first foundation has been laid. But if there be one point of belief more practically important than another, it is this; that the great privilege to which we are entitled, by the terms of our baptismal covenant, is that of seeking and obtaining the effectual aid of the Spirit;

effectual, inasmuch as it does that, which our unassisted nature, even with all the light which the Gospel revelation has shed upon the counsels of God, and the destiny of man, could never accomplish ; it sanctifies us, and enables us to prefer things spiritual to things temporal ; and to worship and serve God with sincerity of purpose, and singleness of heart. It is feared, that many who aspire to be Christians, and persuade themselves that they are so, rest contented in the persuasion that they have been taken into covenant with God by baptism ; that Christ has died to make atonement for their sins ; and that therefore, if they live as well as they can, (that is, as well as they can by their own sense of what is right, and by their own endeavours to practise it,) they shall be saved : but as to any deep and humiliating feeling of their own insufficiency and weakness ; as to any earnest and ardent seeking for the aid of the Spirit ; any cheering recollection of the promises of a Comforter ; to all this they are strangers. They do all which of themselves they are able to do ; except that, without which all the rest is unavailing, the seeking for that spiritual strength which may enable them to do what of themselves they never could do. But again we say, and it is a truth which

cannot be too perseveringly enforced, that the great practical privilege of Christian discipleship is this; it entitles us to the promised aids and influences of the Spirit; *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his; but if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*<sup>3</sup> and it is by a diligent seeking for his quickening power, that we must labour to make the promises of the Gospel our own, and ourselves what the Gospel requires us to be. The circumstance of our being in covenant with God, of our having been baptized, and of having passed by baptism from the power and mastery of sin, into the liberty of the children of God, is a wonderful change in our moral state, in our spiritual capacities, and prospects; but it is not a renovation of the inner man; it is not in itself sanctification; but makes us capable of being renewed and sanctified by the Spirit; who, when he is sought for, and followed by those, whom he has first regenerated in baptism, worketh righteousness in them that believe; as the great spirit of evil, the prince of the power of the air, worketh wickedness in the children of disobedience.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. viii. 9, 11.

This doctrine is briefly, but emphatically, expressed by our Church, when she directs us to pray, that “being regenerate, and made the children of God by adoption and grace, we may daily be renewed by his Holy Spirit;”<sup>4</sup> in allusion to the words of St. Paul, *After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.*<sup>5</sup>

The words, in which the Apostle describes the assistance rendered by the Spirit to the faithful Christian in prayer, are exactly descriptive of the mode, in which, as the Comforter, he supplies *all* the wants, and strengthens *all* the weaknesses of the believer: *likewise also the Spirit helpeth our infirmities.* He does not irresistibly constrain our will. He interposes not the strong arm of his almighty power to crush, or chain down our rebellious passions. He pours not an irresistible flood of light upon the eye, which is closed by pride and prejudice: but *he helpeth our infirmities.* How affecting, how encouraging is this description! how conformable to that character, in which the Holy Spirit has

<sup>4</sup> Collect for Christmas Day.

<sup>5</sup> Tit. iii. 3.

been especially promised to Christians, the character of the Comforter! But how is it realized?

In the first place, the Spirit has laid down for us a plain, infallible rule of belief and practice. The revelations and the precepts, both of the Law and the Gospel, were dictated by the same eternal Spirit of Truth. This is the instrumental aid, which is afforded *generally* to the infirmities of human reason and conscience. But then there is the particular application of this aid to the case of individual men; and this is that work of the Spirit, in which we are most nearly and personally interested; by which he enlightens the understandings of men to discern, and bends their hearts to adopt and follow the truths and precepts so revealed to them. In the first instance, he sets before us<sup>6</sup> a path to walk in; and then strengthens our feet to walk in it. Glorious as is the light of divine truth, it *shineth in a dark place;*<sup>7</sup> its beams fall upon an understanding, which labours under the gross darkness of corruption, and has of itself scarcely a faint and indistinct perception of the things of God. And even if it perceived them ever so clearly, it could not of itself spontaneously choose, and resolutely embrace them: nor has

<sup>6</sup> South, Serm. Vol. V. p. 285.

<sup>7</sup> 2 Pet. i. 19.



it that intrinsic principle of purification, which would work effectually to the understanding, and the reception of saving truth.

This then is the second, and not the least important part of that office, which the Holy Spirit performs in the work of our salvation. Admit that the nature of man is depraved, (and if the Word of God did not assure us of the fact, our own experience would bear melancholy testimony,) and it will follow, as a necessary conclusion, that the cure of this depravation, the restoration of the spiritual and moral agent to health, must be effected by an agent distinct from and superior to human nature itself; that is, by the Spirit of God. *The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*<sup>8</sup> Attend, I beseech you, my Christian friends, to this most important distinction. God giveth freely: *he giveth*, says another Apostle, *to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.*<sup>9</sup> And what are the gifts so freely given? None other than the offer and the means of grace and salvation; his Word and sacraments; the doctrines of the

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 11.

<sup>9</sup> James i. 5.

Gospel; the law of life. But although God giveth freely, man cannot freely receive; that is, the natural man: he cannot, it appears, even *know*, or be perfectly assured, that these *are* the gifts of God, unless he have first given him the spirit by which he may discern the divine impress upon them. Christ is indeed *the light of the world*; the universal light: he shines in the Gospel; and in a certain sense, and to a certain degree, illuminates externally both the good and the bad; but his light is savingly discerned only by those who have a corresponding light of the Spirit within; not a fancied illumination of the soul, superseding the light of its natural faculties; but a renewed and purified heart; or at least a heart awakened from sleep, and roused from its lethargy by the touch of the Spirit; and cleared in part for the first perception of evangelical truth.

The natural light of conscience, implanted in man by his Creator, is now obscured and oppressed by natural corruption; a veil is over the heart, and prevents it from comprehending the glories which surround it: and *if the light which is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness.*<sup>10</sup> Many there are, whose eyes are open to the

<sup>10</sup> Matt. vi. 23.

truth, the historical truth of the Scriptures; who believe them to have been *given by inspiration of God*; who are alive to their sublimity, and simplicity, and beauty; who are not insensible of the light, which the Christian revelation has shed upon the duties and destiny of man, as compared with the faint glimmerings of human philosophy, or the thick darkness of pagan superstition; who live in the full brightness of the Gospel day, and are sensible that they live in it; and yet it has never really enlightened them; because it has never reached their hearts. A way for its transmission thither has never been opened by the Spirit; and yet the Spirit was ever at hand; and the light was streaming around them in all its illimitable fulness and splendour; but they have never sought for his influences, and therefore have never experienced them. Nay, it is possible that they may have had recourse to the very means, by which he ordinarily imparts those influences to the believer's soul, and yet have experienced no effect; and simply because they have used them without any serious consideration of the end to be answered by them; without any hearty and urgent desire for the benefits which they are intended to convey.

*The Spirit helpeth our infirmities*; and there are means of God's appointment by which that help may be obtained: but the help must be sought for, and the means must be used, with all that earnest anxiety and determined perseverance which result from a deep and overpowering sense of the infirmities themselves. The pure Word of God may be preached by faithful ministers, with the serious and persuasive eloquence of truth and affection; the sacraments of grace may be rightly administered, and regularly received: the ordinances of devotion may be so performed, as to produce for the time a decent seriousness, and a favourable impression of religion; the Spirit may be round us, and close at hand, and waiting to be called upon; but yet he is *not* called upon; he is *not* implored; he is *not* earnestly besought *with groanings that cannot be uttered*; and what is the result? The Word preached passes across the mind, as the shadow of a cloud, and is forgotten; the sacramental communion of Christ's body and blood is a communion only as to the outward and visible signs: the seriousness produced by the solemn forms of holiness, is a seriousness of demeanour only, and *that* but for a time: and the whole impression produced, is of the same class with those

undefined and unprofitable emotions, which are excited by the concord of sweet sounds : *And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument : for they hear thy words, but they do them not.*<sup>11</sup> I appeal to your own consciences whether this be not too often the case ; whether all your religious observances and attendances have not been too often unimproved and unimproving ; and if the answer be in the affirmative, I would beseech you to consider, whether you can assign any probable cause for it but this, that the aid of the Spirit has not been sought for in good earnest, and with a determined purpose of heart : and whether, if at any time you *have* been led to seek for him, you have ever failed to experience some degree of his refreshing influence ?

*The Spirit helpeth our infirmities.* What would become of us if it were otherwise ? for there is a Spirit of evil, who is always exercising a malignant activity, to aggravate those infirmities ; the more malignant and the more active, because he knows that the help and the remedy are close at hand. He strives, often, alas ! too successfully, to avert our eyes from the brightness

<sup>11</sup> Ezek. xxxiii. 32.

of the light, in which they are placed by the revelation of God's will : and if a transient gleam of truth shoots across the darkness of a passive uninquiring soul, he straightway interposes some object of present interest, some glittering bauble, or some attractive delight, and effaces the impression almost as soon as it is made. There is thus a contest for predominance and mastery in the moral world, between the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of evil. But there is this important difference, with respect to man, who is the object of that contest ; that whereas the Spirit of evil enters unbidden into the soul ; and takes possession of it ; and fills every part of it with his train of sinful thoughts, and deceitful images of splendour and happiness ; the Spirit of God, though always at hand, and watching with affectionate interest the progress and movements of the immortal soul, and ever ready to step in, and assert his own authority and dominion, and the power of saving grace, must yet be sought for, and invited, and with sincerity entreated ; *Deliver me from mine enemies, O God, for they are too many for me.* Where the necessity is so great, and the succour so near, and so effectual, what can be said for those who neglect to have recourse to it ?

Once more, *The Spirit helpeth our infirmities*: and his first demonstration of aid is, in helping us to feel our infirmities. It is for want of this feeling, that we omit to seek him: and our first prayer to him should be, that we may be made to experience more sensibly our need of him. In proportion as we labour under the consciousness of our own defects and helplessness, will our prayers be more sincere, more importunate, more effectual; and we shall more distinctly understand *what* we ought to pray for, and *how* to pray for it; and the Spirit will at once assist and answer our prayers: *We know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

Finally, brethren, let me again remind you, that it is not enough to have found an expiation for sin in the redeeming blood of Jesus, if its power and curse be not eradicated from the heart by the sanctifying influence of the Spirit: that as we stedfastly believe the one, we must diligently labour for the other; not idly bewailing our infirmities; but seeking for him who will help them; not merely reading his Word, and hearing of him; but experiencing his power over the heart, in bringing it gradually, but

completely, *into subjection to the law of Christ*; working in us by degrees a spiritual existence, a continued walk with God, a life of entire devotedness to him who died to make us all his own; a life of prayer and watchfulness, and intimate communion with him; a life of zealous, active charity; a steady progress towards heaven; a shaking off, one by one, of the fleshly hindrances and ties which bind us to the world, and impede us in our progress towards Christian perfection: till at the last we may take boldness, in the fulness of our spiritual growth, to say, *There is now no condemnation to them which are Christ's; who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit:*<sup>12</sup>—*and the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Rom. viii. 1.<sup>13</sup> Rom. viii. 16.



# SERMON V.

## THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT.

—◆—  
1 COR. XII. 4—6.

*Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same SPIRIT.  
And there are differences of administrations, but the  
same LORD. And there are diversities of operations,  
but it is the same GOD, which worketh all in all.*

IN these words we have a concise, but striking delineation of the economy of the Christian Church, as it existed at its first foundation; built upon a rock by the incarnate Son of God, and visibly and wonderfully protected and upholden by the Spirit of truth. *There are diversities of gifts, (or, as the words ought rather to be rendered, different distributions of gifts.) To one, says the Apostle, in explanation, is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, of a wisdom far superior to that of the wisest of mankind; a*

wisdom which its adversaries were not able to gainsay or resist: *To another the word of knowledge*; ability to understand, and power to explain the oracles of God, and to prove from them the truth of the Gospel: *To another faith by the same Spirit*; such faith, as our Saviour declared would be of efficacy to remove mountains, and to support its possessor under the sharpest trials of human nature: *To another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit*; *to another the working of miracles*; *to another the discerning of spirits*; the power of discriminating between true and pretended Christians, according to that precept of St. John, *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God.*—*To another divers kind of tongues*; *to another the interpretation of tongues.* *But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.* Such is the Apostle's own commentary upon his own words, *There are diversities of gifts, but the same SPIRIT.* Such was the part and province of the Holy Ghost, in the conduct and administration of the primitive Church of Christ.

The Apostle directs the attention of his converts, in the second place, to the great Head of the Church: *And there are diversities of*

*administrations, but the same Lord*: that is, there are different offices and ministries in the Church, which serve to the ends of common edification, when rightly administered by those who are ordained to them; but all are servants of one Lord, members of one body, fellow-workers under one master, Jesus Christ. Here again, St. Paul is the best interpreter of his own words. Writing to the Ephesians, he says of Christ, *He gave some Apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ.*<sup>1</sup> And what is that body of Christ? Hear the Apostle again: *As the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of that body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*<sup>2</sup> This, then, is the relation, in which Christians stand to Christ, as members of his Church upon earth; and this relation is ever to regulate their use and application of the gifts, which are divided to them severally by the Spirit.

In the last place, to complete his statement

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 11.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 12.

of the whole scheme and distribution of the divine agency under the Gospel covenant, the Apostle adds, *and there are diversities of operations ; but the same God, which worketh all in all.* There is a variety of ways in which the divine power is manifested, for the stablishing and edifying of his Church ; all wonderful, though different in object and effect : but whether they are to be more immediately referred to the agency of the Holy Spirit, or to that faith by which the members of the Church abide in Christ, and derive their spiritual life and energy from him, God the Father is in all, and through all, and *worketh all in all* : that is, all things in all men ; *it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.*<sup>3</sup> The Apostle's doctrine, then, in few words is this : Refer all your spiritual gifts and relations and energies to one source and author, the Spirit, the Lord, and the Father, who are one God. St. Paul himself has briefly and emphatically summed up the same doctrine in his Epistle to the Ephesians, *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ; one Lord, one faith, one baptism ; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Phil. ii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. iv. 4.

Such, generally, was the spiritual constitution of the Christian Church, while its members were comparatively but a little flock in the midst of an unbelieving and hostile world; while *the kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed*; while the direct and manifest interposition of divine power was required, to prevent the failure of that promise, *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Such also is its constitution still, as to the essential points of its relation to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The same supreme and universal dominion and operation; the same headship and sovereignty, the same distributive and effectual agency, are still exercised over the Lord's heritage, according to the circumstances and requirements of its condition. It is still true, that there are *diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit*. But as the gifts were then different amongst themselves, so were they different from those which the Spirit now dispenses to the Church; yet different in degree rather than in kind.

The word, which, with reference to its end, is properly rendered *gifts*, means literally, *acts of grace and favour*; and signifies those qualities and perfections, which the Spirit of God freely

and largely bestowed upon men who were otherwise wholly incompetent to the task assigned to them ; enabling them to preach the Gospel, and to prove its truth ; to awaken the consciences, and to convince the understandings of mankind. These are termed, the *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit ; such as are not ordinarily vouchsafed to men, nor for ordinary purposes ; but only upon special emergencies, and for particular ends, which could not have been accomplished without them ; gifts, absolutely and exclusively emanating from the Holy Spirit ; infused into a passive recipient from the divine abundance of power. Such were the gifts of miracles, of healing, of prophecy, of tongues ; and of these some were vouchsafed to the Apostles, and first teachers of the Gospel as it were in perpetuity : and continued to reside in them after the first infusion. Others, as the gift of prophecy, were communicated to them from time to time, as occasion required, and the special purposes of God were to be answered. These were all, in the strict sense of the words, *gifts* ; effects of mere grace and favour to those who received them ; not laboured for, nor derived to themselves from the Source of light and power, by their own efforts ; but freely and

spontaneously communicated to them, not for their own advantage or enjoyment ; but for the accomplishment of God's eternal purposes, the redemption, sanctification, and salvation of mankind.

When the Church of Jesus Christ was once firmly planted in the world, and the ministry of its founders had been recorded in imperishable monuments, it no longer required those signal and extraordinary interpositions of the Holy Spirit, which in the first instance attested its divine original. A revelation, once proved to be authentic, is proved for ever ; and all that is required, for the satisfaction of after ages, is the uninterrupted continuance of its memorials, and a security for the integrity of its records.

To establish in the world a new religion ; to plant the eternal vine in a soil, barren, and hard, and overrun with the luxuriant and noxious weeds of vice, and prejudice, and error ; to convince mankind of the truth and certainty of a revelation, which professed to disclose the counsels and decrees of the Most High, the duties and the destinies of man ; which spoke of a judgment to come ; of heaven and hell ; of an incarnate God ; of one final and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world ; to confirm the doctrines, and to sanction the precepts of such

a religion as this, miraculous gifts were indispensable to its first preachers. But miracles, in attestation of the truth, were requisite only till the truth had been sufficiently attested. Afterwards, an authentic record of their performance was all that was necessary. Now that the truth of Christianity has been long ago sufficiently attested, is a point which no believer will dispute. If, in the opinion of our Lord himself, the records of the Mosaic dispensation so completely proved its truth, that he, who believed them not, would not have been convinced though one had risen from the dead, would not have yielded to the evidence of a miracle performed before his eyes, it is surely impossible to deny, that the Christian Scriptures, once proved to be authentic, and preserved by a continued succession of teachers, precluded the necessity of all other proofs of the truth of Christianity; and that therefore miracles were no longer necessary, after the reception and recognition of those Scriptures by the Church. But it is on all hands acknowledged, that miracles continued no longer than there existed a necessity for them; and therefore we may conclude that they ceased in the Church, either at the death of the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, or shortly afterwards.



But leaving the exact period of their cessation undetermined, we assert with confidence, that miraculous gifts have now, for many ages, ceased altogether. It has been forcibly and conclusively asked, "When the spiritual building is consummate, and not only the foundation laid, but the headstone of the corner has attested the completion of the superstructure, to what purpose should the scaffolds remain standing?" besides, that by so long continuance, miracle would almost cease to be miracle, and become that which is a contradiction in terms, a miracle without a wonder."

<sup>s</sup> South, II. p. 525. His words are these: "Certain it is, that now these extraordinary and miraculous powers are ceased, and that upon as good reason as at first they began. For when the spiritual building is consummate, and not only the corner stone laid, but the superstructure also finished, to what purpose should the scaffolds any longer stand? which, when they leave off to contribute to the building, can serve for little else but to upbraid the folly of the builder. Besides, that by so long a continuance, miracle would almost turn into nature, or at least look very like it: the rarities of heaven would grow cheap and common, and (which is preposterous to conceive) they would be miracles without a wonder." I have altered his language in quoting it, because he has given a wrong meaning to the word *corner stone*: *λίθος ακρογωνιαῖος* is not the foundation stone, but the finishing stone, *κεφαλή γωνίας*, as it is called in Ps. cxviii. 22. The commentators for the most part have explained it, the foundation stone; some, however, more correctly, the stone which, being placed at the angle of a building, binds together the two walls. But I do not find that any have given it its full signification, not only a corner stone, but the head or top corner stone.

We therefore not only believe that miraculous gifts have ceased in the Church of Christ ; but we maintain, that a corrupt branch of that Church, by asserting their continuance in itself, does an injury and discredit to the Gospel ; inasmuch as it virtually declares that the Gospel is not even yet firmly established in the world, but still needs the same miraculous confirmation as at first ; and by the frequency, and absurdity, and questionableness of its pretended miracles, whether we regard the occasion, the mode, or the success of their performance, it debases and disparages the majesty of the Holy Spirit ; giving occasion to the infidel and the scoffer to blaspheme, and to call in question those undoubted miracles which are the solid foundations of our faith. Not many years have elapsed since the extravagancies which were acted in a neighbouring country, at the tomb of a weak enthusiast, afforded to one of the subtlest adversaries of the Christian faith, an argument against the credibility of its genuine miracles. Yet this spiritual juggling (for in this enlightened age it deserves no better name,) is still carried on, not only in the wilds of an ignorant and half-civilized people, but in this very metropolis, in the citadel and stronghold of the Protestant faith.

I love not to make the teacher's chair the seat of religious controversy. Nevertheless, a word must be spoken in season, in vindication of the truth, and for the honour of God; whether against the unbeliever, the enthusiast, or the superstitious. This day is consecrated by the Church to the more particular consideration and honour of that Holy Spirit, who spake by the prophets, and wrought miracles by the hands of the Apostles, for the everlasting confirmation of the truth as it is in Jesus. On such an occasion, and in speaking with all reverence and humility on such a subject, can I, while looking to the present aspect of the Christian Church, forbear from protesting against those gross attempts at delusion which are now again made, with an equal mixture of impiety and folly? We protest against them, from a regard for the souls of men, remembering that *the working of Satan is with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness.*<sup>6</sup> We protest against them, as doing an injury to the cause of true religion; for since those, who now pretend to effect these miracles, claim that supernatural character for their own works, which is claimed for the works done by

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thess. ii. 9.

Christ and his Apostles, every blow, which is given to the credit of one, redounds to the discredit of the other; and we know how easy and common the transition is, when a partial light all at once breaks in upon long continued darkness, from a blind uninquiring superstition, to a fixed and impregnable infidelity.

But that, which is true of the miraculous powers conferred by the Holy Spirit, is equally true of all his extraordinary gifts. The former we deny to superstition, the latter to enthusiasm. Before we can fairly be required to believe the reality of those inward motions and special calls of the Holy Spirit, which some Christians pretend to feel, and perhaps believe that they feel them, we may require of them the same proof, which the Apostles and first believers were able to give, that of doing something which is undeniably beyond the unassisted powers of human nature. I mean, however, unassisted by the Holy Spirit in a special and peculiar manner; for, properly speaking, no Christian is unassisted. He who first created, and who sustains the essence and faculties of the soul, is the source and cause of all its energies and acts. He gives the power, and he concurs by his influence in every action which

has in it any particle of goodness. The child which obeys its parents, as well as the faithful and obedient Christian of maturer age, is, although in a different degree, moved by the grace of God. The different stages of moral and intellectual improvement, through which the mind passes, in the process of learning, and labour, and research, are to be ascribed to the grace of God : yet not so to be ascribed, as to exclude the necessity, or the efficacy of our own exertions. These are necessary, because without them, God does not vouchsafe his aid ; they are efficacious, not of themselves, but because he uniformly blesses them. But it may be said, that these very exertions of our own cannot be made, except by the power of God. True ; and it is equally true, that we cannot utter a word, or lift a finger, but by his power, or permission ; yet he has implanted in us a conscious feeling of our own ability to originate an action ; he deals with us in all his revealed Word as with responsible agents possessing that ability ; he commands us to act as though we had it ; and, practically speaking, we have just as much reason to say, that we cannot set one foot before the other without the direct interposition of his power, as to maintain that we

cannot conceive a good desire, nor direct our thoughts to a right object, but under the constraining influence of his grace. He gives to every man grace enough to take the first step towards that which is good and acceptable to Him. Upon the improvement of that grace, which, because it is given to all, may be called natural, depend those subsequent supplies, by the aid of which a gradual advance is made towards Christian perfection. And these are the promised privileges of Christians, and the peculiar gifts of the Holy Spirit, who by them enlightens, and strengthens, and sanctifies the genuine members of Christ's Church.

But *there are diversities of gifts*, says the Apostle ; a truth, which may at once abate presumption, and check despondency. God desireth all men to be saved. His intention is, that they should all arrive at the kingdom of heaven ; and if any fail, it is by their own fault. But he places them in different stations and offices in his kingdom and household here on earth, and endues them with different capacities and means of serving him. The poorest and feeblest member of the Church has his appointed and appropriate part to perform ; and has the means of obtaining all the spiritual gifts neces-

sary for its performance ; while the wisest, the most eloquent, the most influential, is so only by God's appointment, and derives his wisdom, and eloquence, and influence from the Holy Spirit:—*God, says the Apostle, hath set the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*<sup>7</sup> And therefore let us not hastily pronounce a judgment upon the spiritual state of another, if he appears to be less advanced than ourselves; remembering that there are diversities of gifts, and that the Spirit divideth to every man severally as he will. But there are some results, which are to be looked for in every case ; and where these are wanting, any pretensions made to the gifts of the Spirit, are false, and may be denied. If we be asked what these are ? we answer, with St. Paul, *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,—against such there is no law.*<sup>8</sup>

It is a habit, not less correct in point of fact, than improving to ourselves, to refer all that we have thought, or done of good, to the influence of the Holy Spirit ; but all the evil to ourselves. We should act beforehand with as much energy and diligence as if every thing depended on our

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Gal. v. 22.

own exertions, yet not relying upon those exertions for success; and afterwards look back upon what we have achieved, with an entire renunciation of desert and credit on our own part; and with a grateful and implicit recognition of the effectual influences of God's Holy Spirit.

Lastly, there is a promise concerning the gifts of the Spirit; and the promise is to us and to our children; *I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.*<sup>9</sup> And we have an encouragement to claim the promise; *If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*<sup>10</sup> But do we need his aid? Let me ask in return, Do we believe and live as we ought to do? Do we love God, and pray to him as warmly as we ought? Do we view the world in its right colours? Are our hearts in heaven? The answers to these questions, if made in sincerity, will determine whether we need the aid of the Holy Spirit or not. But *where* shall we seek him? In his Word, in prayer, in the Christian sacraments. If the Spirit be promised to them that ask him, when and where can he be

<sup>9</sup> John xiv. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Luke xi. 13.



asked for, with so much certainty of an answer, as in the great distinguishing act of Christian worship, the communion of the body and blood of Christ?

But then we require the aid of the Spirit even to seek for the Spirit. The first movements of divine grace direct our thoughts towards spiritual things; but in order to the attainment of them, by the right use of those means and resources, which are provided for us under the Gospel Covenant, we must pray earnestly for further help, that we come to a more perfect understanding, a stronger faith, a livelier affection. *The Spirit helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought.* But for this one thing at least we know that we may pray, and let us do it with an earnest and sincere intention; that we may realize that description of the Apostle, having *access by one Spirit unto the Father, and being fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; that so we may grow unto an holy temple in the Lord; and in him be builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Eph. ii. 18—22.

# SERMON VI.

THE CREATION.

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GEN. I. 31.

*And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.*

How sublime, yet how unadorned and simple is the expression, in which the sacred historian describes the Almighty, as surveying with complacency the great and glorious system, which had been called into existence by the word of his power; *God saw every thing that he had made; and, behold, it was very good!* Every part of the vast and intricate machine was perfectly adapted to perform its proper function, and to answer its appointed end. To the eye of a limited understanding, which is able to embrace but a small portion (how small a portion

who can tell ?) of the entire system of the universe, some of its features present an appearance of anomaly and defect: but even of these seeming imperfections, it is discovered, upon inquiry, that many, in their various combinations and ultimate tendencies, are productive of good; and sufficient ground is afforded for concluding, that, if we were able to discern the relative bearings and final results of all that now appears to be defective, we should find reason to believe, that every thing which God has made, is good; inasmuch as every thing is perfectly adapted to answer the end for which he intended it. The test of perfection, in any part of a *system*, is obviously its fitness for the perfect execution of the work assigned to it in that system.<sup>1</sup> Now, the *entire* system of God's government of the universe can never be thoroughly known to us in our present state of being; nor, consequently, can we pronounce with certainty, scarcely, indeed, with probability, upon the degree, in which any created thing is calculated, either by its physical or moral qualities, to fulfil the *ultimate* end and purpose of that government; that is to say, if we judge from their apparent results. Religion, indeed, even natural religion, teaches us to believe,

<sup>1</sup> See Bishop Butler, Sermons, p. 312.

that with reference to the final purposes of God, whatever is, is right. It is truly remarked by a wise, though not inspired writer, "All the works of the Lord are exceeding good; and whatsoever he commandeth, shall be accomplished in due season. And none may say, What is this? Wherefore is that? for at convenient time they shall all be sought out. He seeth from everlasting to everlasting, and there is nothing wonderful before him. A man need not to say, What is this? and Wherefore is that? for he hath made all things for their uses."<sup>a</sup>

The sublimity, which has been noticed in the words of the text, arises from their simplicity. The same remark applies to the whole account which Moses has given of the Creation. And this peculiarity, although not a proof, is yet an indication, that the narrative is divinely true. There is no attempt at that poetical amplification which marks the fabled records of pagan mythology. Even a heathen critic has noticed the unequalled grandeur of that description, *And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.* It is surprising, that where the inspired historian has been so studious of brevity and simplicity, so much of fanciful speculation should

<sup>a</sup> Ecclesiasticus xxxix. 16.

at different times have been built upon his account of the Creation; and still more surprising is it, that this account should be treated, even by those who pretend to the name of Christians, with ridicule, or at best with contemptuous disregard, as a tissue of traditionary fables. It is certain, that the book of Genesis is the oldest book in the world, that of Job, perhaps, excepted. Its first chapters contain an account of the creation of all things, and of the fall and subsequent fortunes of mankind, till the flood came upon the earth. Those books of other nations, which come nearest to it in age, either expressly mention, or distinctly allude to the principal facts which are recorded in it; but in *them* the truth is perverted and distorted, and seen obscurely through the mist of human fantasies and inventions, while in the original document itself, it shines forth in pure and unmixed lustre.

If the Almighty was pleased to make a revelation of himself to the Jewish nation, (and that is a fact which for the present we may take for granted,) that revelation was certainly made through his servant Moses. There is no good reason for doubting that Moses was the author of this book of Genesis; and if it were necessary, or even permitted, that he should deliver to the

chosen people of God an account of matters so important, as the origin and fall of man, and the promise of a future restoration, it is absurd to suppose that he would have stamped, with the authority of his divine commission, a traditionary fable. Besides, those parts of the Mosaic account, of which we have the means of investigating the truth, we know to be consistent with fact; it is, therefore, reasonable to conclude, that the others are so too. At one time, indeed, it was maintained, that the appearances presented by the earth, in the order and disposition of its superficial parts, was irreconcilable with the Mosaic account of the creation. Later researches, however, and these, too, conducted by men not predisposed to find its confirmation there, have established its general accordance with the actual phenomena of the earth; an accordance which must have been wholly unknown to the sacred historian, unless it were revealed to him by inspiration. But to Christians, a more decisive argument for receiving the Mosaic history in its literal sense, as undoubtedly true, is the authority of our Saviour himself; who, knowing that the Jews regarded it as a divine book, not only cast no doubt upon their belief, but himself referred to it as an authentic and authoritative record.

This discussion, or rather this cursory mention of discussions, might appear to be misplaced, were it not a part of the same system which obliterates the doctrine of a divine Atoner from the records of inspiration, by the perversion and mutilation of the Word of God, to throw ridicule and scorn upon the introductory pages of revelation, because they explain the origin and consequences of that fall, which made an atonement necessary.

With respect to the sources from which Moses derived his knowledge of the order and process of the creation, it might have been handed down to him by tradition from the time of Adam, to whom it was most probably imparted by revelation before the fall; or he might have been directly informed of it by inspiration: but in any case, we have a sufficient assurance, in his divine mission to the Israelites, that he was secured from substantial error by the Spirit of Truth. The account which he has given, although brief and general, is sufficiently circumstantial to be impressive: and there was a good reason for its being made as circumstantial as it is; namely, that the Israelites might be taught the supreme majesty and universal dominion of the great Creator, and the folly of paying divine honours to the

creature, as the Egyptians did; who worshipped, not only the glorious luminaries of heaven, but fishes, and birds, and cattle, and creeping things.

We might now proceed to draw a contrast between the majestic simplicity with which the Sacred Historian represents the expression and effect of the divine will,—God commanded, and it was done,—and the laboured descriptions of uninspired writers. We might explain, and defend from cavilling objections, the division, into six distinct periods, of the time in which it pleased the Almighty to accomplish the work of creation; but I would rather apply myself, at present, to a more practical and improving consideration of this interesting portion of Scripture; taking for granted its truth, and the belief of those who hear me in the records of revealed religion.

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.* The Christian Scriptures inform us that he created them by his Son, his eternal Son, *whom he appointed heir of all things; by whom also he made the worlds.*<sup>3</sup> *In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God; and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*<sup>4</sup> *By him were all*

<sup>3</sup> Heb. i. 2.

<sup>4</sup> John i. 1, 3.



*things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, (that is, the different orders of angelic beings,) all things were created by him and for him.*<sup>5</sup> Such is the concurrent testimony, borne by two Apostles, to a truth which ought to be deeply imprinted in a Christian's heart, that the world was made by and for Jesus Christ; to be the scene of his creating, his protecting, his redeeming power. By him all things were at first created; by him was the work of redemption undertaken, when the first promise was given to his fallen creatures; by him were direct personal communications made to the patriarchs from the Deity; by him were the children of Israel visibly protected and guided through the wilderness; to him was turned, with steady gaze, the eye of prophecy; the rise and fall of empires were preparatory to the establishment and growth of his universal kingdom. *He upholdeth all things by the word of his power;*<sup>6</sup> and exercises dominion and providence over the world; and will continue so to do, till the end cometh, when he shall have subdued all things unto himself; and shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the

<sup>5</sup> Col. i. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. i. 3.

Father ;<sup>7</sup> and angels, and glorified spirits will behold him, as he was in the beginning, one with the Eternal Father; *Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end; the first and the last.*

*God created the heaven and the earth.* He created them for his own glory; monuments of his power, and of his mercy. Well may we conceive those spirits of a purer essence, whom he had called into being before the existence of the world, contemplating with surprise and joy the wonders and beauties of the new creation, *when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.*<sup>8</sup> Feelings of admiration and thankfulness, the same in kind, but less intense in degree, in proportion to the more limited scope of our knowledge, ought surely to be awakened in us, who partake, with those higher orders of intellectual existence, the privilege of ascending through the works of nature to nature's God. Whether in those glorious orbs which are set in the firmament of heaven; in the stated recurrence of the seasons, seed time and harvest, the former and the latter rain; in the countless varieties of beings endued with life and motion; in the uses and beauties of the vegetable world; in the wonderful fabric and adaptation

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Job xxxviii. 7.

of the parts of organized matter: in any and in all of these, the pious mind will trace the finger of an all-wise Creator, and discover the tendency of all his works to accomplish the purposes of perfect benevolence. *God saw every thing that he had made; and, behold, it was very good.*

In order to appreciate, according to its value, the weight and splendour of that testimony, which the visible creation bears to the power and goodness of the Creator, we should accustom ourselves to consider, what would be the sensations and reflexions of a reasonable being, were it possible, that after a period of seclusion in darkness and solitude, the glories of the material world were, for the first time, all at once presented to his astonished sight.

Is it not incumbent upon us, to divest ourselves of that careless unobservant apathy, which is generated by a familiar intercourse with the most wonderful objects, and to contemplate the monuments of divine benevolence and power, as being, what indeed they are, the objects of continually renewed admiration and gratitude? The same Almighty hand, which first launched into measureless space the system we inhabit, still guides and controls it in its course. He *upholdeth all things by the word of his power.* By his

permission, nay, rather by his continued energy, the sun gives his light, and the earth sends forth her flowers and fruits. It is He that watereth the hills from his chambers, and feedeth the fowls of the air, and gives to the lilies of the field their raiment of inimitable lustre.

From the consideration of those vestiges of creative omnipotence, which every object around him displays, the Christian is led to contemplate its effects in his own person. His first and most natural reflexion, upon beholding any phenomenon in the material world, which surprises or delights him, will be, "This is the work of God. I, also, am the work of God. By his providence I subsist; my being, the being of the universe, is in his hands. A breath created, and a breath can destroy. But he will *not* destroy, till the purposes of his mercy shall be accomplished; nor will he overlook or neglect the most inconsiderable part of his creation. Without his knowledge and permission *not even a sparrow falleth to the ground*. Wheresoever I turn my eyes, behold the memorials of his greatness! of his goodness! I cannot, indeed, fully comprehend many of those processes, by which the mechanism of the universe performs its appointed work: omniscience alone can fully discern the workings

of omnipotence : but I see abundant proofs of contrivance and benevolence, to convince me that all things are from the hand of a Creator equally great and good. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works ; in wisdom hast thou made them all!*"

He will further improve such reflexions, by considering, that of all the works of creation, recorded by the inspired historian, man himself was originally the noblest ; being made but *a little lower than the angels*, and in the image of God ; rational, immortal, and without stain of sin. And then, while he deplores the loss of that image, and the degraded state to which he is reduced, his thoughts will be led to the abundant mercy of God, in having wrought a second creation for him by Jesus Christ. Whatsoever was lost in Adam, is restored in Christ ; and by observing what the Scriptures say of that which is restored, we shall discover what was lost ; and in both, shall find matter of rejoicing and thanksgiving, mixed with penitential grief and fear. St. Paul exhorts us to *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness* ;<sup>9</sup> *to put off the old man with his deeds, and to put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him* ;<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Eph. iv. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Col. iii. 10.

that is, in and by the knowledge of Christ, through the Spirit; having *the inward man renewed day by day*;<sup>11</sup> and having replaced in us that rectitude of understanding and of will, which at the first constituted the most important feature of the resemblance borne by man to his Creator.

Jesus Christ is *the light and the life of men*;<sup>12</sup> the renovator of the spiritual, as he was at first the creator of the material world. His word, *quick and powerful*, goes abroad into the chaos of a soul disordered by sin, where all is *without form and void*, where gross *darkness is upon the face of the deep*; and says, *Let there be light; and there is light*. His *Spirit moves upon the face* of that troubled sea of unholy thoughts, and irregular desires and passions; and calms it into peace, the peace of God. All things become new to the regenerate soul. The world assumes a different aspect; seems to be made for other purposes than those which once appeared to be all in all: new desires are kindled in the heart; new prospects opened to the soul; new fruits spring forth spontaneous and abundant, the fruits of holiness and peace: *we are his workmanship*, exclaims St. Paul, *created in Christ Jesus unto*

<sup>11</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 16.

<sup>12</sup> John i. 4.

*good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them:*<sup>13</sup> hence it is, that *if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; and that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature, or creation.*

But man, created upright and holy, fell by transgression, was alienated from God, and cast out of Paradise. And man, created anew by Jesus Christ, may yet lapse a second time from holiness regained, and be cast forth from the kingdom of God as an alien and intruder. *The last state of that man is worse than the first: for if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*<sup>14</sup>

Lastly, in contemplating the wonders and glories of creation, and the important part which is assigned to *him*, for whom the creating Word became incarnate, and subject to the infirmities of a material frame, the pious man will remember, that all this, himself excepted, will last but for a time. As it had a beginning, so will it have an end. There is only one eternal, as there

<sup>13</sup> Eph. ii. 10.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 20.

is only one perfectly good, the Creator himself. Man is immortal, but not eternal. He will never die, but there was a time when he did not exist. But God is *from everlasting to everlasting*; <sup>15</sup> *having neither beginning of days nor end of life.*<sup>16</sup> Of all the works of his almighty power, that alone, which he created in his own image, shall endure for ever. *Thy years, O God, are throughout all generations. Of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*<sup>17</sup>

Admirable and beautiful as are the works of God, they are destined to perish, when the purposes of their creation shall be finally accomplished; and to be succeeded by more glorious and more enduring monuments of his power. The language of the evangelical prophet, whether it be taken in its literal or figurative sense, is equally adapted to fill the mind with awful conceptions: *Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens*

<sup>15</sup> Ps. xc. 2.<sup>16</sup> Heb. vii. 3.<sup>17</sup> Ps. cii. 24—27.



*shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment; and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner.*<sup>18</sup> The Christian goes further into futurity, and looking to the glory of the eternal kingdom, prepares himself to enter therein: *The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*<sup>19</sup> The sun shall cease to rise and set; days and years shall be no more numbered, when the redeemed of the Lord shall enter upon their new and final state of being: *The sun shall be no more their light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto them; but the Lord shall be unto them an everlasting light; and their God their glory.*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Is. li. 6.<sup>19</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 10.<sup>20</sup> Is. lx. 19.

In the mean time, while we continue in the world, *waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>21</sup> we may find abundant materials for thankfulness and self-improvement, in the contemplation of God's creating power. We were nothing, and he called us into being; not a being of pain and sorrow, as he *might* have made it; but of blessing and promise, of enjoyment and hope. What it contains of good, is from his free and unrequited mercy; what it presents of real evil, arises from ourselves. Its imperfections, if they can properly so be called, may be made conducive to final good; for that *all things work together for good, to them that love God*, we know, on the authority of him by whom all things were made. The blessings which are showered around us in the works of creation, in all their endless combinations and improvements, are blessings indeed, if we use them as though we knew them to be perishable, and not the ultimate objects of regard to an immortal soul. *They that weep must be as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of this world passeth away.*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 1 Cor. i. 7.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 30.

May these considerations find their way to your hearts; and may we be so renewed by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, that at the coming of that awful day, in which all that is mortal and material shall pass away, we may be restored to a state of spiritual perfection, exceeding even that in which the new creation was contemplated by its Maker, when he *saw every thing that he had made; and, behold, it was very good.*

# SERMON VII.

## THE GENERAL DELUGE.

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MATT. XXIV. 37.

*As the days of Noah were,\* so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be.*

IN these words our Saviour couples together, by a comparison, the two great catastrophes of the world, its desolation by the flood of waters, and its final destruction at the second coming of the Son of Man. Describing the solemn and awful circumstances which are to mark that dreadful day, of which *knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven*, but the supreme Judge alone, he specifies with peculiar emphasis, and minuteness of illustration, its suddenness. *As the days of Noah were, so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before*

*the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ; and knew not until the flood came and took them all away : so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.*

We are so much accustomed from our early childhood to hear the general deluge spoken of, if not in familiar discourse, yet as a subject of philosophical speculation, that the expression passes across our mind, without exciting any strong or permanent feeling ; and without leading us to dwell with any seriousness of attention upon the comprehensive horrors of the reality. But it ought not to be so. The history of the deluge is recorded in the pages of inspiration, as an awful lesson of eternal interest to every inhabitant of that world, which is itself a perpetual monument of the fact. If the characters of holy men, and the individual examples of God's righteous judgments, are there *written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come,*<sup>1</sup> how much more legibly are the traces of divine instruction impressed upon the records of that dreadful event, which stands prominent in the annals of the world, as a proof and memorial of the justice of God, in punishing obstinate

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 11.

and impenitent wickedness. I think, therefore, that we cannot more profitably employ the present opportunity, than in considering some features in the scripture account of that memorable event, and in endeavouring to improve the consideration of them to the purposes of a holy fear.

I need hardly tell you that the Mosaic account of the deluge has been repeatedly called in question. This is not the place to answer in detail all the objections which have been made to it. But the general principles of those objections may be met by answers at once popular and satisfactory. In the first place, looking at it as a purely historical question, there is no single fact, to which the early history of mankind bears a more concurrent and universal testimony, than that of a general deluge. It is a leading feature in the most ancient records of every country, a landmark, as it were, in the mythology and the poetry of mankind. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude, that it did actually happen; because it is not a fact, which the reason of man, in the earlier ages of the world, uncultivated by philosophy, and unaccustomed to induction, would have enabled him to infer. Considering Moses only in the light of an historian from tradition, it is impossible to deny, that his account of the

deluge is infinitely more simple, and natural, and probable, more consistent with the wisdom and justice of God, and with the nature and circumstances of men, than any other account which has ever been given; and it is in a high degree unlikely, that amongst all the people of the earth, there should not have been one, who had preserved, in some tolerable degree of exactness, the leading circumstances of the most wonderful and awful event which had ever happened to the world. So that, historically speaking, there is sufficient reason for believing, that a general deluge did take place; and that the remembrance of it would be preserved by some people, the descendants of those who survived it. Now unquestionably amongst many accounts of that great event, circumstantially differing, and yet, to a certain degree, substantially agreeing with one another, that of Moses, as it is by far the most ancient, is also by far the most simple and probable.

But we assert, in the second place, that we have, in the present state of the world itself, an irrefragable evidence to the fact of a general deluge. The surface of the earth presents unquestionable marks of its devastating force. The phenomena which it presents, are such

as render unnecessary, in the present state of human knowledge, any laboured proof of the fact. Thus far, therefore, the evidence of nature itself tends to establish the truth of the sacred historian. It is beyond question that there has been a general deluge. But we are told, that if the appearances of nature establish the fact of a deluge, they are at variance with the account which has been given of it by Moses; and so, as to the credibility of the Bible history, we lose one way more than we gain another.

When first this objection was urged, great stress was laid upon it by those who denied the inspiration of the sacred historian; and the scoffer exulted, and the unsteady believer trembled. But they, who had other and higher grounds for being convinced that Moses was an inspired interpreter of the will and counsels of God, waited patiently till the subject should be more thoroughly investigated; satisfied that natural philosophy, if followed in a spirit of truth, would never land them in conclusions at variance with the disclosures of revelation. And such has been the result. In proportion as the science of geology, which concerns itself with the superficial phenomena of the globe, has been rendered more exact and certain, by the collection and combination of



facts, and by sound and rational induction, have its conclusions been found to correspond with the principal features of the Mosaic history. The most celebrated and the most acute of those who have reduced it to a system, declare it to be a truth thoroughly established by that science, "that the crust of our globe has been subjected to a great and sudden revolution, the date of which cannot be fixed at a remoter period than five or six thousand years from the present time; and that the small number of men, and other animals, which escaped from that revolution, have since propagated and spread over the lands which were then left dry by the flood."<sup>2</sup>

The minor features of the history are less important, as far as its authenticity is concerned. The traces of one or more still earlier deluges, which philosophers think they have discovered in the appearances presented by the earth, may or may not be rightly construed. The question in no way involves the truth of the Mosaic history. As we are not called upon by Scripture to admit, so neither are we required to deny the supposition, that the matter without form and void, out of which this globe of earth was framed,

<sup>2</sup> Cuvier's *Essay*, p. 171, quoted in *Bishop Sumner's Records of Creation*, I. p. 352.

may have consisted of the wrecks and relics of more ancient worlds, created and destroyed by the same Almighty Power, which called *our* world into being, and will one day cause it to pass away.

It may not, however, be out of place, to notice a difficulty, which lies on the surface of the sacred narrative, and is likely to attract the notice of the most cursory reader. The Almighty is represented as declaring to Noah, after the waters had subsided, and he was establishing his covenant with the children of men, *This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations; I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.* But it is objected, that if the sun shone, and the rain fell before the flood, the rainbow must have been seen in the sky, and could not then for the first time have been set in the clouds by a new and special ordinance of God. Now, in the first place, if it were necessary to meet this objection at all, we might say, that it was certainly possible for the Almighty Maker and Preserver of the world, who *giveth forth the rain out of his treasures,* and withholdeth it at his pleasure, so to have constituted

the atmosphere, as to prevent the appearance of that phenomenon to the fathers before the flood. But we are not constrained to have recourse to that supposition. *The glorious circle bent by the hand of the Most High*, as it is termed by the Son of Sirach, may have been an object of wonder and admiration to all the descendants of Adam : but it was not till after the deluge that the Almighty was pleased to adopt it, as an everlasting memorial of the covenant which he then made with those who survived that visitation ; that as often as men should look up to the clouds pouring forth their treasures, and see that glorious arch stretched across the heavens, they might remember the promise of God, whose goodness endureth for ever, and who now, mindful of his covenant, *sendeth his rain upon the just and unjust*, not to desolate but to fertilize the earth. The religious man never fails to read, in that beautiful appearance of nature, the signature of the Creator to the covenant of preservation ; under the provisions of which the world which we inhabit continues to move in its accustomed course ; and seed time and harvest come round, and man reaps the fruit of his labours ; and all things proceed in uniform, harmonious order, towards the final consummation ; when this

world, having answered the purposes for which it was created, shall be dissolved, and *there shall be new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*<sup>3</sup>

But although *the promise of God standeth firm*, that he will not utterly destroy the earth and its inhabitants with a second flood of waters, he has not precluded himself from the manifestations of his justice; but has, from time to time, executed the purposes of his wrath upon different portions of the world, enforcing upon mankind the recollection of him, who has declared that *he will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity*. The awful destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the desolation of Egypt; the extirpation of the idolatrous Canaanites; the successive downfall of Israel and Judah; together with all those wonderful vicissitudes of national power and prosperity, which were foretold by the prophets of Israel, and realized in the history of the world;—all these are proofs, and tokens, that although the Most High *will not again smite every thing living as he once did*, yet there are seasons when *the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Is. xxvi. 21.

The history of that awful catastrophe, which changed the face of the globe, and swept away its inhabitants, furnishes abundant matter of improving consideration, both to nations and individuals. How strong must have been that detestation of sin, which caused the Almighty Creator of the world to lay waste the fairest monuments of his power and goodness, as a necessary attestation of his justice! How brief, but how emphatic is the description which the sacred historian gives, of the wickedness which called for that tremendous exercise of power! *And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its way upon the earth.* Now surely it is a matter of serious consideration, to every community which acknowledges the sovereignty of God, how near an approach it may have made to that state of corruption and apostasy, which, when it was almost universal, involved the whole earth in such a fearful visitation. It is matter of serious consideration, not because they have to apprehend a similar visitation, but because God has other plagues and punishments in store, by which he may chastise them as a nation; or, if in that character they escape, they may, as individuals, be treasuring up for themselves heavier *wrath*

*against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*<sup>a</sup> It is the duty of every nation, at least of every nation possessing the authentic records of God's providential interference in human affairs, to study his dealings with itself; and to trace, in the changes of its prosperity, the symptoms of his anger or his favour. If he forbear from the extremities of justice, if he destroy it not with a flood of waters, nor consume it with fire from heaven, he may perhaps open upon it the flood-gates of adversity, and try it in the furnace of affliction. When great reverses befall a powerful nation; when its glory begins to dim; when its commerce is checked; when its resources fail; when doubt and hesitation agitate and disturb the body politic, and shake the fabric of society;— what is it but the hand of the Almighty laid heavily upon a sinful people, to reduce them by the pressure of suffering, to their allegiance and duty towards him? Wo to that nation which fails to read the awful lesson, and to profit by it. Let us look to it ourselves, my brethren; for God has been speaking to us for some time past, and it is a fearful thing not to listen to him. But I shall be told, This is an

<sup>a</sup> Rom. ii. 5.

unauthorized assumption on your part. You presume that God has lifted up his voice, and laid his hand upon us ; but why ? What are the sins which have required such admonition and rebuke ? Again, then, I say, examine and see, whether in the world at large, and even in this nation, a much better state of things, comparatively speaking, prevails, than that which the Lord once thought fit to visit with the desolation of destruction.

The leading features of that state seem to have been a forgetfulness of God ; a careless irreligion ; an entire devotion to temporal things, and a total disregard of future retribution. Observe our Saviour's description ; *As in the days that were before the flood they were eating, and drinking, marrying, and being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark ; and knew not until the flood came and took them all away : so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.* They knew not ; that is, they thought not ; they never troubled themselves to consider that the flood was coming, nor the causes which were bringing it upon them ; for they did not want admonition nor prediction ; *the long-suffering of God having, as St. Peter says, waited in the days of Noah,—who was a*

*preacher of righteousness*<sup>6</sup> to a sinful world. Now, I may safely ask, are not by far the greater part of mankind at this moment proceeding in the same careless and thoughtless manner? Are all, or even many, visibly impressed with an awful apprehension of the near approach of that day, when God will visit us, and take an account? And yet it is precisely the same thing to us, as to our future and eternal state, whether we know that we are to perish, at no very distant period, in a general deluge, or that we are to yield one by one to the common law of mortality.

I said that the question should be answered comparatively; with reference to our respective circumstances and advantages. The fathers before the flood were vicious, and careless, and forgetful of God; and they were swept away by the waters: but how many advantages of instruction, how many helps to piety, did they want, which we possess; and therefore how much more guilty will the same degree of ignorance or ungodliness be in us! This principle of comparative justice is expressly sanctioned by our blessed Lord, in a sentence, which, if it be applied to ourselves, may well cause us to tremble at the thoughts of advantages neglected, and

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 20.    2 Pet. ii. 5.



opportunities wasted or misused : *Wo unto thee, Chorazin ! wo unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.* Might not the preacher of righteousness take up the burthen, and say to this country, *Wo unto thee, thou nation highly favoured of the Lord ! for if the law of holiness, with all the sanctions and motives which it receives from the Gospel, had been preached to the world before the flood, as it has been preached to thee, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Whereas thou profitest not by these advantages, nor turnest unto me with thy whole heart. But remember, that at the judgment-day there will be a comparison of opportunities, and means, and motives, as well as of good and evil deeds ; and it shall be more tolerable for those who sinned and perished without the perfect law of holiness, than for thee. Would this sentence be too severe ? Look at the face of society in this Christian country ; examine it throughout, from the great features of its national character, to the minuter and more personal details of private*

life. Is it, properly speaking, of a religious complexion? Is religion visibly made an object of primary importance? Does its government display a paramount anxiety to promote the cause of Gospel truth and holiness? Do its nobility contend for the honour of a conspicuous rank in their Redeemer's kingdom? Are its merchants as *fervent in spirit to serve the Lord*, as they certainly are *not slothful in business*? Are the people at large walking with God, in singleness of heart and sanctity of life, all, in their several departments, exemplifying the power of the Gospel? And are the ministers of that Gospel uniformly faithful to their trust, *as they that must give account*? Are they burning and shining lights in the world, guides and patterns to the flock of Christ, and devoted, soul and body, to the work of Evangelists? Are all, from the highest to the lowest, manifestly living under the expectation of a judgment-day, anxious above all things to flee from the wrath to come, but rejoicing in the unspeakable riches of redeeming love, and displaying, in all the vicissitudes of life, the energy and efficacy of grace? Yet, surely, this may reasonably be expected of us, by Him who has given us so much; and if he finds it not, our sentence is written in his Gospel; *It*

*shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for thee.*

If, upon an impartial examination of the present state of society, we find its more prominent features to be the very reverse of what I have described, it becomes our duty, in the next place, to inquire, how far each of us, in our individual capacity, has contributed to make them so. Let every Christian consider, in how great a degree the religious character of the society and country in which he lives, is dependent on his own. In how great a degree no man can determine; for as no man can tell to what extent one profane or profligate sinner may poison the moral atmosphere in which he lives, nor define the limits of infection; so neither can any man trace, through all its consequences and remote effects, the blessed influence of one bright example of evangelical purity and love. But had we no hope of improving, and rendering more Christian, the tone and habits of society, by our own single example, still we must persevere, as though every thing depended upon it. The case of the ancient world was hopeless, long before Noah went into the ark; yet he persisted in practising and preaching holiness to a careless and hard-hearted race of sinners, till

the flood came and took them all away. In the midst of a profane and thoughtless world, the little flock of Christ will find their description and their promise in those words of the prophet, *Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day, when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.*<sup>7</sup>

To a mind, which is under the influence of religious principles and feelings, the most pleasing as well as improving object of contemplation is, the love of God; his creating, preserving, and redeeming love. But it is sometimes, and to the careless always, profitable, to think of his terrors; and to regard the instances, which are recorded in Scripture, of his more signal judgments upon impenitent sinners, as pledges and earnest of the fiercer wrath to come. Let no man delude himself into a belief, that the Lord

<sup>7</sup> Mal. iii. 16.

will not be as exact in fulfilling his threats of vengeance, as he will be gracious in fulfilling his promises of mercy. He declared to Noah his intention of destroying a sinful world, and he did so. He announced to Abraham that a fiery deluge should descend upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and it did so. He told his chosen people that they should be carried into captivity, and be trodden under foot of the Gentiles, and so it was. He warned the unbelieving Jews of the approaching desolation of their holy city, and their own dispersion; and his warning was fulfilled to the letter. How, then, can we attempt to soften down and mitigate the terror of those awful declarations, which speak of future retribution to the ungodly, fire and brimstone, everlasting burnings, the worm which dieth not, and the fire which never will be quenched? No, my brethren; be assured that God will be true not only to his promises, but his threats. The flood came, and the day of the Lord *will* come. The face of the earth was once destroyed; but in that day, the earth itself and the heavens shall pass away. *The world that then was, says St. Peter, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens and the earth, which now are, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against*

*the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men.\* But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up. Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?†*

Let us seek for grace to live, as though we knew that the day of the Lord were close at hand to all and each of us; and as though we remembered the strictness of that rule by which we shall be judged, according to the measure of our receipts, especially of those spiritual advantages which in a Christian, at least in a Protestant country, are common to all; the faithful preaching of the pure word of God; the right administration of his sacraments; the public service of a scriptural Church; ample opportunities and means of learning the will of God, and of obtaining grace to perform it, of labouring in his vineyard, and of securing our reward. *Blessed is that servant whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.*

\* 2 Pet. iii. 6.

† 2 Pet. iii. 10.

## SERMON VIII.

PHARAOH'S HEART HARDENED.

EXOD. X. I.

*And the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh : for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might show these my signs before him.*

IF the Bible possessed no other claim to be considered the best and most valuable book in the world, it would be enough to say of it, that it is the only book, which gives any authentic and trustworthy account of God's providential dealings with mankind. From no other source do we know, with certainty, the manner in which he has from time to time interfered in the affairs of men, and specially directed the course of events to particular ends. There are many transactions recorded in the history

of former times, of which the pious and reflecting reader is inclined to say, 'Truly this was the Lord's doing: surely this must have happened under the immediate direction of that allwise and allpowerful Being, who ruleth all the kingdoms of the earth, and beholdeth all that is done in the world.' But we cannot be certain, as to any particular fact, of its import and bearing, with respect to the purposes of God's providence, although we know that he exercises a general superintendence and control over human affairs.

But in the Bible we have the faithful picture of God's dealings with his creatures, pourtrayed by holy men under the direction of his own Holy Spirit. We there see remarkable events distinctly traced up to their first cause and origin, and pursued to their remotest consequences. We are told, *how* the Almighty interposed his power, and *why*: we are taught, in what a wonderful way he protects his faithful servants, and rescues them from danger and trouble; and we are taught, that which is more admirable still, how he sometimes renders the passions and vices of ungodly men subservient to the ends of his wisdom and mercy, and so maketh *all things*, even the seeming evil of events, *work together for good*.



It is true, that we do not find in the Bible a full and circumstantial history of God's government of all the nations that we read of in history : but we have, in the first place, a summary account of the manner, in which he exercised his providence over mankind in general for many ages ; particularly in the signal punishments which he inflicted on cases of remarkable wickedness : and we have, in the second place, a very full and minute history of the way in which he governed a particular people : and by this we are taught some certain rules, which, with due allowance for the circumstances of each particular case, may safely be applied to the history of other nations and individuals. Upon the principles of natural religion we might perhaps infer, that in the government of human affairs Almighty God would interpose his power to chastise enormous offenders against his law, and to correct the irregularities, which human wickedness and folly produce in the constituted order of things : but we could not be so well assured of the fact as we are now, by the positive testimony of the Bible, which presents to us so many distinct instances, to illustrate and confirm our reasonings.

The great purpose, no doubt, of the Scriptures

of the Old Testament was, to prepare the way for the final dispensation of grace. Every thing was done, by God's appointment, under the old covenant, and every thing by his inspiration written, with a view to the future completion of the promise. The whole history of God's chosen people, and of the proceedings of his government, as far as they were concerned, appears in many of its features inexplicable, unless we bear in mind, that the great and ultimate object and issue of the whole was the coming of Jesus Christ. But besides this principal end, the Scriptures of the Old Testament were no doubt intended to teach mankind useful and impressive lessons of piety and virtue; to set before us many examples of good and pious men, signally protected by the care and favour of God during the time of their sojourning upon earth; and, on the other hand, many wicked, idolatrous, and ungodly persons, who lived without him in the world, and received at his hands the just, if not the full and final reward of their offences. *All these things, says the Apostle, happened unto them for ensamples, and were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*<sup>1</sup> Nay, even of those chosen servants

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. x. 11.

of the Most High, whose piety and zeal are proposed for our imitation, the very faults and lapses are also faithfully recorded, in order that the most careful and religious amongst us may be on his guard, and *take heed lest he fall*.

Scarcely any part of the Old Testament history is more interesting or important, than that which relates the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt. It is from the pen of one, who was the principal actor in that memorable transaction, the chosen minister of Jehovah to execute his will, and to found that wonderful church and kingdom which subsisted until Shiloh came. One remarkable feature of this history is the spirit of candour and modesty, in which the historian speaks of himself. That great law-giver and prophet records, with the most perfect impartiality, not only the obstinacy and unbelief of his people, but his own offences against God. Upon all occasions he directs the attention and regard of the children of Israel from his own person, which they would naturally be disposed to reverence, to the Lord whose servant he was. Another feature of the history is, the plain and authoritative manner, in which Moses describes the intentions and proceedings of God himself; a manner which bespeaks the

consciousness of an acquaintance with the Divine counsels, as far as they regarded the fortunes and conduct of his people Israel.

Amongst the various descriptions, which Moses has given, of the methods by which it pleased God to effect the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, one of the most remarkable is that, in which he speaks of the inveterate and incurable obstinacy of Pharaoh; *the Lord said unto Moses, Go in unto Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before them.* You are no doubt aware, that this is one of those passages in the Bible, to which the unbeliever objects, as being contrary to our notions of the justice and goodness of God. If God really desired that Pharaoh should let the children of Israel go, it was surely very unjust and cruel, to harden his heart, and to constrain him to disobey. This is their objection; and perhaps it is one which may have occasioned some perplexity even to the pious reader of Scripture. Let us examine into its force.

We may observe, in the first place, that a person, who is impressed with an awful and overpowering notion of the universal providence of God, who firmly believes that nothing can happen

in the world, but by his direction, and with his knowledge, may justly say of any thing, and every thing which *does* happen, that God has done it. If Moses pleads with Pharaoh, and causes him to relent, that is a circumstance which God must have foreseen, and which therefore happens by his providential ordinance: and so it may be said that God softens the heart of Pharaoh: but if again, from whatever cause, that feeling of pity is extinguished, and he becomes more obdurate than ever, then it may be said, with equal truth, that God has hardened Pharaoh. This answer, philosophically speaking, is a sufficient one; inasmuch as it shifts the difficulty to that point, beyond which it can never be pursued, with a view to its entire solution; I mean the absolute irreconcilableness, by human reason, of two independent and undoubted truths, the foreknowledge of God, and the free agency of man. But to many minds it will not be quite satisfactory. The following illustration may perhaps be more convincing.

Suppose that a person, with his eyes open, is walking directly towards a precipice, of which he has been repeatedly warned, and to overstep which, he knows must be his certain destruction. In spite of every friendly admonition he still goes

on. If, when he is very near the brink, and still obstinately advancing towards it, God should strike him with blindness, and he were then to fall over the verge and perish, no person would presume to charge the Almighty with injustice. In this case it would be said, that the blindness, inflicted by the decree of God upon the party in question, was a just punishment for his own wilful obstinacy. It is surely not unjust, morally speaking, that he, who will not save himself from harm, when an opportunity of doing so is not merely offered, but pressed upon him, should have that opportunity withdrawn from him for ever. The case, which I have supposed, is a parallel one with that of Pharaoh; and with those of other persons mentioned in Scripture, of whom it is said, that God "blinded their eyes," or "hardened their heart." In the present instance the whole tenor of the narrative shows, that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, up to a certain point, was his own work; that it was deliberate, and gradual. We may trace the ebbing and flowing of conscience; the transient and suppressed strivings of reason against the force of passion and pride. Sign upon sign was wrought to convince him that the hand of God was stretched out in

behalf of the Israelites; and he *was* convinced; and more than once he relented, under the influence of that conviction; and at any time, before the last denial of all, he might have avoided the destruction which was preparing for him; for undoubtedly it was not till the last, that God left him entirely and finally to the hardness of his heart, then rendered fixed and fatal by the judicial dereliction of a controlling influence. This is what is really meant by God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh. He employed miracles and wonders to soften it; he sent repeated messages to him, denouncing his anger; and when all had been tried in vain, he determined to employ no further means to change the obstinacy of his spirit, but wholly withdrew himself, and left the obdurate Pharaoh to the guidance of his own passions. His heart was hardened by the lenity and forbearance which were shown to him; and which ought to have produced a contrary effect. That Pharaoh's own impenitent and disobedient conduct was the cause of God's giving him up to utter hardness of heart, appears from many expressions in the narrative, and particularly from the conclusion of the ninth chapter; *And when Pharaoh saw that the rain, and the hail, and the thunders,*

*were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants.*

The same explanation may be given of that prophecy of Isaiah, which declares of the Jews, that *their eyes should be shut, and their hearts hardened; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts*; which St. John describes as the work of God himself; the simple fact being, that the Jews having shown themselves obstinately incredulous, against the strongest and most undeniable testimony, God did not think fit to employ any further methods of convincing them; but left them to their own unbelief, with all its fatal consequences. In the case both of Pharaoh and the Jews, much was done to soften their hearts, and to persuade them to save themselves from the wrath to come. They well knew, before the day of their visitation, the evils that were in store for them: it was not until many miracles had been wrought, and the plagues ceased, that the Egyptian's heart was hardened to destruction.

It is not possible to conceive, nor could Moses, who entertained such just and sublime notions of the Deity, have intended to say, that the just and merciful God is first the suggester of evil thoughts, and then the avenger of them. We



are bound, in common justice to the writer, to give another interpretation to his words; and we have seen that this may be done, in consistency, not only with the general tenor of his writings, but with the facts of the case. But, as we before observed, all these things were written for our admonition. There is no feature of the proceedings of Divine providence delineated in Holy Scripture, from which we may not derive some profitable instruction for ourselves. The case of Pharaoh teaches us a most important and awful lesson, that the Spirit of God will not *always strive with man*;<sup>2</sup> that grace given, and obstinately resisted, may be finally withdrawn; and that if a man will make his own heart wicked, he may at last be left to its dominion, and consequently to self-wrought destruction.<sup>3</sup> This is the doctrine both of the Old and New Testament. St. Paul declares, that the general wickedness and corruption of manners, into which the heathen world had fallen before

<sup>1</sup> Gen. vi. 3.

<sup>2</sup> "When the Lorde calleth man and hee resisteth, making himselfe unworthie of the kingdome of heaven, hee doeth then permitt him unto himselfe: that is, hee leaveth man unto his owne corrupte nature, according unto which the heart of man is stonie, which is mollified and made tractable by the onely grace of God: therefore, the withdrawing of God's Grace is the hardening of manne's hearte; and when wee are leafte unto our selves, then are wee hardened."—BULLINGER's *Sermons*, translated by H. I. 1577. p. 492.

the time of our Saviour, was not only the natural consequence, but the just punishment of their obstinacy, in shutting their ears against the voice of conscience, and refusing to act up to those principles of religion, which God had implanted in the breasts of all his reasonable creatures: *Because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.—For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections.—And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.*<sup>4</sup> The giving them over to a reprobate mind was precisely the same thing as hardening the heart of Pharaoh. So with regard to Christians, our Saviour describes the case of a man, who, having neglected or abused the means of grace, relapses into a carnal state, as being far more dangerous than his condition had been before the first reception of grace. St. Paul applies the instance of Pharaoh to the case of God's ancient people the Jews, who were deserted of God and sealed to destruction; and shows that it was no impeachment of the divine justice: for when the

<sup>4</sup> Rom. i. 21, &c.

forbearance and long-suffering of God produce no effect upon sinners, but that of confirming them in their wicked courses, he may well, in his own good time, let fall the blow so long delayed by his mercy, and make them signal and memorable examples of his justice.

Dreadful indeed it is to think, that it should be possible for us in any case so to offend God, as to make him our enemy. If without his continued friendship and support we cannot walk uprightly nor securely for a single hour, what will become of us, if he should set his face against us, and leave us utterly in the power of those, who desire our destruction, and lie in wait for our souls? But *can* God indeed ever become our enemy? Strictly speaking, no: not in disposition. God *hateth nothing that he hath made*, nor desireth the death of the very worst of sinners; but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live. Yet, when he has employed such means, as ought to be sufficient to reclaim the sinful soul, and turn it to himself; when he has reiterated his warnings, has offered all his means of grace, and urged all his motives to obedience, and all are rejected; must we not expect, that he will turn away his face in anger, and discontinue every gracious influence

and aid? When the hardened sinner scoffs at his messages of penitence and peace, and turns from religion with a contemptuous *Get thee from me, see my face no more*, is it too much to suppose, that the Lord will answer him finally, as Moses answered the King of Egypt; *Thou hast spoken well; I will see thy face again no more?*<sup>5</sup>

We know that there is a sin against the Holy Ghost, and that it is a sin unto death. What is its precise nature we are not informed; but we ought on that account to be the more fearful lest we fall into it unawares. There is good reason to believe, that it is of this kind, to sin obstinately against the suggestions of the Spirit, and to resist the means of conviction and conversion. Wilful opposition against Divine Truth is the highest degree of this sin; blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; a disparaging of his power, as put forth in confirmation of the Messiahship of Jesus. But when the truth of the Gospel is felt and acknowledged, opposition against grace is hardly less dangerous. There is, in that Gospel, every imaginable motive to holiness; the mercies of the Lord, and his terrors; his precepts, and his promises of grace. But

<sup>5</sup> Exod. x. 29.

besides this, he is continually admonishing the sinner, and inviting him to turn and be saved; seldom perhaps by the ministers of his Word,—for obstinate sinners, if they be not too careless to come and hear that Word preached, are afraid of being told the truth—yet from some quarter or other they are sure to hear it; and if from no other, their consciences will sometimes remind them of heaven and hell. Or they are warned by sickness, and by secret thoughts of penitence and reformation, which pass across their minds like the shadows over the earth; glimpses of holiness and peace, which God in his mercy suggests to them, but which they dismiss and disregard. There may be, and probably will be a time, when he will bear with them no longer; but will withdraw his warning and restraining grace, and leave them to their own exorbitant affections, and to the bias of their own perverse and evil hearts. Deserted by God, bereft of his grace, confirmed in impenitence, they are placed without the pale of forgiveness, and become vessels of wrath. If the truth of the Gospel be confirmed by the Holy Spirit; if it be the same Holy Spirit which puts into our hearts all good desires, then undoubtedly a Christian, who sins against the known law of

the Gospel, and the clear conviction of his conscience, sins against the Holy Ghost, and is in a greater or less degree guilty of that offence, which caused Pharaoh to perish in the hardness of his heart.

True it is, that no degree of sin can be positively said to be unpardonable. We cannot pretend to mark out the precise degree and extent of obstinacy, at which the divine favour and forbearance will cease; nor whether it will then cease finally, in any particular instance. Yet it is a fearful thing to think, that it is possible to fall, through our obduracy, into such a state of hopeless alienation from God, that he will leave us to ourselves, to be *hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*<sup>6</sup>

I entreat you to lay these reflexions to heart, and to consider, whether you never manifest any degree of that unhappy perverseness which has now been described. It is not merely by a determined resistance to the means, which God employs to instruct and convert us; it is not merely by a determined perseverance in open wickedness, that we may evince our hardness of heart, and tempt him to leave us to ourselves; but it is the same offence in kind, though less heinous

<sup>6</sup> Heb. iii. 13.

in degree, wilfully and habitually to neglect any opportunity, or mean of grace, which is provided for us by the Giver of all spiritual gifts. Apply this to yourselves, ye who profane the Sabbaths of the Lord, who absent yourselves from his sanctuary, and from the preaching of his Word. Apply it to yourselves, ye who neglect that most holy and comfortable Sacrament, which was appointed by the Lord himself to strengthen and refresh you; the commemorative symbol of that sacrifice by which you are saved; and the channel to convey that grace, without which your salvation will not be final. How can you tell, what degrees of strength and comfort he offers you in that holy ordinance, or, consequently, in what degree you withstand his mercy, and defeat his purpose? Take care, that you do not go on, from year to year, in a course of disobedience and neglect, which must inevitably tend to harden your heart, rendering you less susceptible of spiritual aid and comfort, and therefore less likely to obtain it.

May the Lord give us grace to know, before the day of our visitation, the things which concern our peace! May he conduct us, as willing and obedient children, to himself; softening the hardness of our hearts by all, or any of the

means which he thinks best ; if it may be, by gentle influence and secret whispers of the Spirit ; but if needs be, by sharper and more grievous admonitions ! And if our hearts cannot be softened till they are broken, even so may he make them his own ! for *a broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, wilt thou not despise.*



## SERMON IX.

CHOICE OF A RELIGION.

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JOSHUA XXIV. 15.

*And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve.*

**W**HEN Joshua gave this direction to the children of Israel, he did not intend to say, that they were at liberty to choose between the gods whom their fathers, in times of ignorance, had served, or the gods of the Amorites, and the Lord who had delivered them out of Egypt, as though no very important consequences depended upon the choice: but that it was necessary for them to adopt a decided line of conduct; and either to devote themselves in good earnest to the service of Jehovah; or to be considered as choosing the service of *other gods*, whom their fathers had served, who *dwelt on the other side of the flood*

*in old time*;<sup>1</sup> to follow the idolatrous practices of the people amongst whom they lived; and to take the consequences. It was as if he had said; You may perhaps repine at the strictness of that law, which the Lord has imposed upon you; the burthensome ceremonies, and multiplied observances which it requires. If you think that these are not more than counterbalanced by the advantage of having the Lord himself for your king and protector, you can, and probably will give way to the idolatrous errors and abominable indulgences of your heathen neighbours. Be it so: you will then have made your choice; and you know what reward to expect. But do not flatter yourselves, that you can serve both the true God, and the gods of the Amorites, at one and the same time; the two services are utterly incompatible. Therefore make your choice once and for all. Mine is already made: *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said; God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods.*

I come now at once to the application of this text; and intend to show, that what Joshua called upon the children of Israel to do, must be done by every reasonable creature; at least

<sup>1</sup> Josh. xxiv. 2.

by every one who has ever heard of revealed religion. To all such, it is the language of reason, as well as of the Scriptures, as soon as they are able to discern between moral good and evil; *Choose you this day whom ye will serve.*

Unless a man is certain, which he never can be, that his soul will perish together with his body, religion can never be a matter of indifference to him. In any case he must choose between religion and no religion. Even the people of the heathen world, who had no knowledge of revelation, had yet such a knowledge of God, as rendered them accountable to him for their actions; and consequently made it imperative upon them to choose their religion: and for choosing wrongly they incurred the just displeasure of the Most High; *because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful—but became vain in their imaginations—and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and to creeping things.*<sup>2</sup>

It is evident, that if God has been pleased to make a revelation of his will and purposes to mankind, that revelation is the only sure

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 21.

guide to which they can look, in matters of religion. If God has told them that they must believe certain truths, and practise certain duties, in order to secure his favour, no man can expect to escape his just anger, who disbelieves, or disobeys his words: and if there be in the world any religion, which is authenticated by sufficient evidence, as having been revealed to mankind by God, it cannot possibly be a matter of indifference with any man, to whom that religion is proposed, whether he receive it or not. No reasonable being is at liberty to pass it by, as of no importance; or to say, that he will not trouble himself to consider whether it be true or false. For the question, whether it be true, involves another most awful one, that of salvation or condemnation; and he, who refuses to look at it, or neglects to walk by it, does yet in effect make his choice: he chooses for himself condemnation. When the souls of all mankind shall be assembled before the judgment-seat of Christ, none may appeal from that tribunal, upon the plea, that they never considered the law of God proposed for their acceptance, nor made any choice of religion. The not having done so, is itself a sin deserving of punishment.

There are various grounds of conviction and

belief, upon which religion may be embraced. All men are not affected in like manner by the same arguments and motives; but there must always be conviction and belief; there must always be a choice. If religion be embraced at all, it must be both by the understanding and the heart. It requires sacrifices; it promises rewards: the will must be interested in the question; and therefore there must be a choice. We say then, that unless a man have *chosen* his religion, he has in fact no available religion at all; and we fear this is the case with too many persons in the world. It is to be feared that there are many, who have never seriously laid this question to heart, *What must we do to be saved?* for that is in fact the same thing as considering what religion we shall choose.

When Christianity was a new religion, and before it was firmly established, and extensively received; while the profession of the Gospel was attended with great peril of persecution, and even of death; those persons who embraced it, did so upon deliberate consideration and conviction: it was with them a matter of the most serious and determined choice. On the one hand Jesus Christ invited them to escape from the wrath to come; to repent and believe in him,

and be saved. On the other hand, the world held out, not only its present enjoyments to those who adhered to it, but its menaces of poverty and persecution to those who renounced it: and although many remained in the service of the world, without paying any attention to the message delivered to them from God, yet all who *did* take up the cross, must have done so from conviction and choice. But no such alternative is now presented to those, who live in a country, which has for many ages received the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is no longer persecuted; it is not even openly denied or called in question, except by a few miserable sinners, who have no influence upon public opinion. So that in fact there is no question raised, at least men are not compelled to make an open choice, between Christianity and any other religion. But one evil consequence, which results from this general and unresisted predominance of Christianity, is this; that men become Christians as a matter of course, without inquiring why they are so; and consequently without a thorough understanding of that great and vital truth, that *there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we may be saved*, but only the name of the Lord Jesus.

Now we maintain, that religion is still a matter of choice. If you are not called upon to choose between Christianity and paganism, or any other false religion; yet still you must make your election between Christ and the world; between a carnal and a spiritual state: and it must be a deliberate choice; made after a due consideration of the advantages which each has to offer; or at least from a sincere feeling of heart, which prompts you to prefer one to the other. A state of careless neutrality is not permitted; *he that is not with me, said our Saviour, is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.*<sup>3</sup> He who is not *decidedly* a Christian is no Christian at all; at least as far as his own prospects of salvation are concerned. All attempts to compromise the question, and to serve Christ, just so far as his service does not interfere with that of the world, will be fruitless; *ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

Yet we see too much reason to fear, that this is the actual state of a very great number of professing Christians. They are well content to bear that name; and see no reason why they should lay it aside. It subjects them to no particular inconvenience; they take good care that

<sup>3</sup> Matt. xii. 30.

it shall not debar them from any of the profitable or honourable things of this world; nor from many of its customary pleasures. They attend, with decent regularity, the ordinances of their religion, except such as they imagine may require of them a more than ordinary degree of self-denial: and thus they endeavour to make Christianity, which is the purest, the most uncompromising, the most heart-controlling of all religions, compatible with just as much pleasure and indulgence as is not inconsistent with outward decency. This profane hypocrisy, or, to call it by a gentler name, this miserable self-deceit, in the most important of all concerns, arises simply from this; that such men have never made choice of their religion. They never *choose whom they will serve.*

Ask of yourselves whether it be not so. To some, at least, of those who hear me I may propose the question, Have you ever, since you have arrived at years of discretion, applied yourselves in good earnest to consider whether you should embrace religion or not? Have you ever taken a careful and deliberate survey of the various paths, which profess to conduct mankind to happiness, and selected that which leads to life eternal? When was it that you



retired within yourselves, to meditate upon the certainty of your being accountable to an almighty and omniscient God, for every part of your conduct, and to consider by what methods you might hope to escape from his just indignation? Did you ever say to yourselves, “I know that I must inevitably go either to heaven or to hell; that the strait path and the wide way are both before me to choose, and that choose I must? I know that I may be saved by Jesus Christ; for he is *the way, the truth, and the life*;<sup>4</sup> *no man cometh unto the Father but by him*: but then I must come unto him heartily and resolutely. I am sure that I cannot be saved by the world; because the world and all that it contains will pass away, and the *very elements will melt with fervent heat*, when my soul shall receive its eternal doom from the mouth of the supreme Judge. Nothing can make amends to me for the loss of life eternal: *for what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?*<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, if I determine to embrace the Gospel, and to follow Jesus Christ, I know that I must submit to many temporal inconveniences; to much self-denial at least, perhaps to much

<sup>4</sup> John xiv. 6.<sup>5</sup> Matt. xvi. 26.

“endurance, and many costly sacrifices. Can  
“I make up my mind to relinquish those indul-  
“gences, for which the natural man pleads so  
“strongly, rather than injure the welfare of my  
“immortal soul? Can I resolve to despise the  
“scoffs of profane companions, the false opinions  
“of the world, the sordid pursuit of gain, the  
“charms of convivial intercourse, the reputation  
“of talent, and more than all this, rather than  
“swerve, in the slightest degree, from my Chris-  
“tian integrity? Can I do all this? and what  
“is more, do I feel, in the very depth of my heart,  
“my own sinfulness of nature and infirmity of  
“purpose? Am I prepared to lay aside all over-  
“weening confidence in my own wisdom and  
“goodness, and to *receive with meekness* the  
“revealed word and will of God, and his free  
“unrequited mercy; and to seek for his grace  
“by all the appointed means? Dare I engage  
“myself, by a solemn compact and covenant  
“with the Searcher of hearts, to do, or to  
“attempt all this? Shall I make religion my  
“choice, and from henceforth resign myself  
“unreservedly and implicitly to the service of  
“Jesus Christ, and the guidance of his Holy  
“Spirit? Yes, verily, by God’s help I will.”

Have any such thoughts as these at any time

occupied your minds, and produced their due impression on your hearts? Some process of this kind must be gone through, before your religion can be such as may be depended upon; before you can be genuine, consistent disciples of that Master, who claims your best affections, your undivided allegiance. This is an act of choice; such an act as will be likely to fix religious principles in your heart; to fit it for the reception of grace; and to prepare you for every good word and work. The want of such an act is discernible in the inconsistency of men's practice with their outward profession of the Gospel, their cold and heartless prayers, their unfrequent and negligent reading of God's Word, their disregard of his ordinances, their excessive love of pleasure and amusement, or their exclusive devotion to worldly business. Whenever these symptoms are plainly discoverable, *there* has been no *choice* of religion.

But again, I repeat it, the choice must be made. It *must* be made some time or other. If it has been forgotten or neglected in early life, it must be made at a later period; and *will* be made, when once the heart is really touched with a sense of its own condition and its wants. But it *ought* undoubtedly to be made in the morning

of life ; as soon as the reason is sufficiently matured, to discern between good and evil. One of the most touching features of the commendation bestowed by St. Paul upon his youthful friend, is this ; *From a child thou hast known the Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*<sup>6</sup>

Religion is the proper business of our whole lives. We are placed in this world for the express purpose of being religious ; and every part of our existence, which is not employed in the business, either of preparation, or of actual religion, is so much time lost. Every person to whom the Gospel is proposed, as the way of salvation, ought very early to give it his most serious consideration, and to *choose whom he will serve*. It is too much the fault of parents that this is not done more frequently and more seriously than it is : and it is indeed a fault—a sin I should say—of no trifling magnitude. What a strange and sad inconsistency there is in the conduct of many Christian parents ! They know perfectly well that there is nothing in the world of so great consequence to their children, as that they should be fixed betimes in religious principles and habits ; and yet they take little or no pains to

<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 15.

effect it. They are for the most part contented to leave the religious instruction of their children to their teachers and spiritual pastors; whereas it is their own particular and sacred province, to watch, with jealous care, over the growth of principles and motives in the minds of their children; to give them an early insight into the peculiar doctrines and duties of the Gospel; to direct their attention, while young, to the immense difference between things temporal and things eternal; and to familiarize them, even in their childhood, with their holy, but merciful and kind Redeemer.

But, alas! the usual course of education, the usual tenour of parental instruction, is not much calculated to produce religious seriousness. The young Christian is accustomed to hear a great deal concerning the advantages and enjoyments of the present life, and the best mode of securing them for himself.<sup>7</sup> These are the ordinary subjects of conversation, the objects at which all the world seem to be aiming: the tide and current of human life, and the breath of popular opinion, are all moving in one direction. Christian parents manifest great anxiety, and take infinite pains to place their sons in lucrative situations;

<sup>7</sup> See Paley's Sermons, p. 7.

and if a young man is fixed in a post, which gives him a fair prospect of a provision after a few years, his friends think they have done their duty; and for the rest he must look out for himself. But does he perceive anything of the same watchful solicitude about the concerns of his soul? Do his parents exhibit the same intense anxiety respecting his choice of the religion upon which his salvation depends, as they manifest about his election of a business or profession? Is it made a topic of rejoicing and congratulation, if he should give decided evidence of his having, like Mary, *chosen the good part*? Alas! the contrary is notoriously the case.

Why does it happen, that when the Church invites her younger members to come forward, and make an open profession of their allegiance to Jesus Christ, and of their devotion to his service, *Choose this day whom ye will serve*, so many still hang back, from ignorant timidity or bashfulness, or from a worse cause, an entire carelessness and unconcern? Why, but because they have never been made to feel the indispensable importance, the absolute necessity of choosing their religion once for all? and the fault rests too commonly with their parents. Yet it is the duty of their parents, in a far higher degree than it is

the duty of their minister, to make their children Christians in understanding, and on principle, as well as by name. What a dreadful responsibility is theirs, who neglect any probable means of putting their children into the way of salvation! What anguish will pierce their hearts, if at the judgment-day their child shall cry out against them, My father and my mother forsook me; they kept me back from Christ; they gave me no preservative against sin; I perish by *their* neglect!

But it is no less incumbent upon *you*, Christian masters and heads of families, to direct your servants, and the younger inmates of your house, in the choice of their religion. When Joshua had proposed to the children of Israel, in the words of the text, *Choose you this day whom ye will serve*, he concluded by declaring, *as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*. It is a part, a most important part of your duty towards your servants, to assist them, either by your own instructions, or by procuring for them that of others, in forming clear and active notions of religion. It is a part of the duty which you owe to the Church, of which you are members, to bring them into her bosom, and to enable them to profit by her ordinances and means of grace.

To you, my younger friends, let me say, with all the earnestness and sincerity of a real concern for your salvation, *Choose you this day whom ye will serve.* You are old enough to discern between the good and the evil: both are set before you; and God expects that you will make your choice. Do not flatter yourselves that you can remain, for a certain number of years, in a state of neutrality and indifference, and *then* make your election; for that will be in effect choosing at once to serve the world rather than Christ: and you will hereafter be not only less qualified, but less inclined to enter into the service of your Redeemer. Remember, that you have been already solemnly dedicated to him; given to him; redeemed from your lost state; made capable of sanctification, and, in due time, of advancement to glory. This is the great purpose of your life, and ought to be the main object of the whole and every part of it. To choose between Christ and the world, that is, the sinful pleasures of the world, is to choose, in all probability, between happiness and misery in this life, but certainly between eternal bliss and woe in that which is to come. If you *confess not Christ before men*, if you make not an open choice of the Gospel, neither will he *confess you*



*before his Father in heaven*; and if you mean to confess him at all, which you *must* do, to be saved, can there be any period of life so proper for it, as that, when you are first able to form a right judgment of the privileges and blessings which he offers to you? Believe me, he expects you to come to him now; to bring him the first-fruits of your life; to consecrate to him your reason, yet unperverted; your affections, yet uncorrupt: and in return, he will extend over you the arm of his protecting love; will pour his grace into your hearts; will give you a relish for the things of God; will enlighten you more and more in the saving truths of his Gospel; and will strengthen you to withstand the trials to which your age is most exposed.

But what I say to you, I say to all those, who have no fixed, and well considered, and heart-felt principles of religion; *Choose you this day whom ye will serve*. You think, perhaps, that you *are* serving God: but it is not serving him, merely to attend the ordinances of public worship, and to abstain from the commission of the more flagrant sins, unless you serve him on principle; from a steady regard to his honour, and from a sense of gratitude for the mercies which he has wrought for you in Jesus Christ. It is

not serving him, unless you are consistent in your profession and practice; devout in your own closet and in the bosom of your family, as well as at Church; diligent to read the word of God as well as to hear it; actively charitable and beneficent, as well as strictly just and honest; pure and holy in your secret practice and thoughts, as well as in outward appearance; observant of all the ordinances of religion, and not of some only, to the neglect of others; cheerfully and devoutly acknowledging the unspeakable mercy of God in the work of your redemption, not only in the ordinary solemnities of public prayer, but in the more characteristic and peculiar act of Christian worship, appointed by the Lord Jesus himself. Certainly no man who has really *chosen* his service, can refuse *him* that mark of honour and thankfulness, or deny *himself* that source of grace and strength.

May the Lord give us grace, seriously to consider the actual state of our souls; to feel the necessity of choosing, sincerely and resolutely, whom we will serve. May he take away from us all lukewarmness and indifference, in the momentous question of salvation, and dispose us by his grace to come unto *him* once and for ever. *Lord, to whom shall we go? thou*

*hast the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.\* Lo! we forsake all and follow thee!†*

\* John vi. 68.

† Matt. xix. 27.

## SERMON X.

DISPOSITIONS FOR, AND GROUNDS OF CONFIDENCE  
IN PRAYER.



PSALM LXXXVI. 7.

*In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; for thou  
wilt answer me.*

OF the Psalms of David, which have been justly designated, as far as doctrines and precepts are concerned, an epitome of the whole Scriptures, none are more beautiful than those which were composed by that favoured servant of God in the dark seasons of affliction. For this peculiarity two reasons may be assigned. In the first place, the language of sorrow is the natural, unstudied language of the heart; the expression of genuine sentiment and feeling, undebased by affectation or conceit. The heavy hand of affliction, while it crushes the grosser appetites, and shuts out worldly thoughts and wishes, forces into action

all the gentler and purer affections of the soul, and gives unwonted energy and richness to the natural eloquence of the heart. In the second place, there is a sound in the language of genuine sorrow, which awakens an accordant tone in the breasts of those who hear it. The calamities, which call it forth, are the common lot of humanity. They may soon be ours: or if not the same, yet we too have our sorrows: and the expression of another's wo is irresistibly affecting, when it serves to remind us of our own.

This indeed is a peculiar and characteristic beauty of those sacred songs of Zion, from which the text is taken, that every servant of God may find in them expressions of joy, or sorrow, suitable to his own particular case; by meditating upon which he will be chastened and instructed, or supported and consoled. But the afflicted, more especially, may learn from them the methods of a godly sorrow; combining a deep and almost overwhelming sense of personal sin, of human infirmity, and of the instability of worldly goods, with an humble but stedfast trust in the goodness of God, and an anxious desire to improve and profit by his fatherly correction. By contemplating the portrait, which the Psalmist has delineated of himself, of his principles,

his emotions, and his resources in the most trying emergencies of life, we learn how to grieve, yet not despond; to lament, yet not complain; to sigh for the mercies of God, yet not to murmur at his corrections; to bewail our own sinfulness and weakness, yet to recognize his hand interposed to relieve us from a burthen too heavy for us to bear.

And in thus applying, and appropriating to himself the sentiments and language of the Psalmist, the Christian experiences a degree of refreshment, perhaps exceeding even that which David himself enjoyed; inasmuch as he has a clearer view of God's providential government, a more certain knowledge of his will, more abundant evidence of his love and compassion, and a more distinct assurance of reconciliation and forgiveness. The truths and blessings of the Gospel, which the Psalmist beheld in prospect, the Christian possesses in all their glorious reality: and therefore, while he adopts the words of the royal prophet, he adopts them in an enlarged and exalted sense; makes the Gospel their commentary, the Apostles and Evangelists their interpreters, and *him that hath the key of David*<sup>1</sup> the opener of his hid treasures.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. iii. 7.

The eighty-sixth Psalm is an earnest prayer to God for deliverance from trouble, offered up in the full persuasion that it would be answered; a persuasion, built upon the recollection of past vouchsafements, the certainty of God's consistent and unfailing goodness, and the consciousness of sincerity and faith in the suppliant. The construction of this Psalm deserves to be noticed, especially in the first part, where the Psalmist reiterates his prayer, and after each repeated entreaty, assigns the reason, why the Most High might be expected to lend a gracious ear to his petitions. *Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me! for I am poor and needy. Preserve my soul! for I am holy. Be merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto thee daily. Rejoice the soul of thy servant; for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee; for thou wilt answer me. I will praise thee, O Lord my God; for great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the nethermost hell.* We have here set forth, in expressions the most simple but pathetic, the chief reasons for the duty of prayer, and the great encouragements to its performance: the weakness and helplessness of man; the condescending and willing mercy of God;

his acceptance of the service; and the experienced fulfilment of his promises.

*Bow down thine ear, O Lord, and hear me!* God is described in Scripture, by images adapted to human comprehension, as an almighty king, seated upon his throne of glory; surveying at a glance the whole expanse of the universe; seeing the actions, hearing the words, and reading the thoughts of all his creatures; bowing down his ear, in tender mercy, to the humble, holy suppliant, and to the repentant sinner; but turning away from the prayers and offerings of the proud, the ungodly, and the careless. We are not indeed to conceive of him, as of a being invested with a bodily form, or fixed in a particular locality; and yet some such personification of the Deity, as the Scriptures abound in, seems to be absolutely necessary, to fix the notions, and to direct the aspirations of the earthly worshipper. Certainly the expression, *bow down thine ear, O Lord*, conveys to ordinary minds a livelier image of the gracious condescension of our Heavenly Father, than the mere abstract proposition, God is merciful, and hears the prayers of his servants. Be that as it may, the very first ingredient in prayer should be, a deep and awful sense of the supreme excellency



and majesty of God, and of the immeasurable distance which separates us from him whom we address. *He that cometh unto God must believe that he is,*<sup>2</sup> and that belief implies a just idea of his nature, as the creator and governor of the universe, in which the globe that we inhabit occupies but a point, and each individual man is but one of millions of reasonable creatures, equally the work of his hand, and alike entitled, as far as we can discover, to be the objects of his care. That any one of the innumerable beings, who people his creation, should be permitted to approach him, with the certainty of attracting his notice, and obtaining his gracious regard, is a mercy, which must be felt before we can pray at all; and which, when it is indeed felt, cannot fail to excite our deepest admiration and gratitude. *O Lord,—who hast set thy glory above the heavens;—when I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?*<sup>3</sup>

Our sense of the divine goodness is enhanced, by a consideration of the grounds upon which we are permitted to claim it. *Bow down thine ear,*

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xi. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm viii.

*O Lord, and hear me* : Why ? Because I deserve that stretch of condescension ? because I have done the Lord good service, and am of right entitled to his consideration ? No : but *because I am poor and needy* ; for the very reason, which might be thought to render me undeserving of his notice, and to place me out of the sphere of his regard. But this is a striking and characteristic feature of true religion, and one which shows its adaptation to the actual condition of man, and the requirements of his nature, that it represents the Deity, as most regardful of those, who stand most in need of his consideration ; and brings the lowest, and the poorest, and the most afflicted of mankind the nearest to the throne of his mercy : far different, in this respect, from Natural Religion, as it is called, the religion of the philosophers, which makes the self-sufficiency of wisdom a ground of confidence in approaching God ; far different from the religion of the heathen world, which gave to the rich and noble the almost exclusive privilege of an intercourse with their deities. But true religion, regardless of all secular distinctions, all intellectual differences, makes humility the basis of true confidence ; represents the universal Father and Ruler of the world as looking down upon the

children of sorrow with the eye of tender pity ; and describes those, who stand most in need of his assistance, as the most likely to obtain it ; those dispositions of the heart being the passports to his favour, which affliction is calculated to cherish and promote.

To have a title then to the merciful consideration of God, we have only to be sensible that we need it. The mere want of it will not insure our obtaining it, nor the bare acknowledgment of wanting it ; but a genuine, heart-felt conviction of our own helplessness, and God's all-sufficient power ; of our own absolute want of desert, and of God's free and unbounded mercy. But let me not be mistaken. When I speak of our having a title to his merciful regards, I mean not a title intrinsically our own, arising out of any quality inherent in ourselves ; but that which God is pleased, of his mere mercy and goodness, to constitute and consider as a title : and in this sense, to be miserable, and to feel that we are miserable, in the largest signification of the words, is to be entitled to a favourable hearing from God. *Bow down thine ear, O Lord ; hear me ; for I am poor and needy :* poor and needy, not merely as the children of this generation understand the terms : but poor

in merit, poor in righteousness, poor in spirit : needy, not simply as standing in need of worldly goods or comforts, but as being in extreme and urgent need of his helping mercy; sinking under the weight of our sinfulness, and the fear of his wrath ; *Lord, save us ; we perish !*

Thus then it appears, that an awful sense of the supreme excellency and greatness of God must be accompanied by, or rather, I should say, that it will be coexistent and coordinate with a deep conviction of our own necessity. The apprehension of our own danger, combined with the knowledge of God's power and inclination to deliver us, will make us importunate and eloquent in our supplications. The deeper our humility, the more easily will our hearts be lifted on the wings of hope towards the mercy-seat. The clearer our view into the depths of our natural misery, the brighter will be our prospects of the goodness and providence of God. *Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly : but the proud he knoweth afar off.*<sup>4</sup>

The second plea, which David urges for a favourable hearing, at first sight appears to be inconsistent with that spirit of self-abasement, which has been described as an indispensable

<sup>4</sup> Psalm cxxxviii. 6.

qualification for him who so prays as to be heard. *Preserve my soul; for I am holy:* or, as it is otherwise rendered in the margin of our Bibles, *one whom thou favourest.* Taken in this sense, the expression has nothing presumptuous in it: and even if we follow the common version, *for I am holy,* we are not to understand that David lays claim to any holiness of his own, or pleads it as a title to the divine favour; but only as declaratory of the diligence and sincerity with which he had endeavoured to keep the commandments of God, and to walk in his ordinances. How truly sensible he was of his own want of righteousness, appears from the fifty-first Psalm: *According unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.* Truth in the inward parts, then, that is to say, intrinsic spiritual holiness, David altogether disclaims; and adds to his disclaimer a confession full of hope, that whatever inward holiness he might

possess (for that is meant by wisdom) was given him of God. When therefore he pleads his own holiness, as a ground for his acceptance with God, he intends only to urge it as a proof of his having heretofore found favour with him, that he had been enabled to walk uprightly before him, and to possess that principle of holy obedience without which no man can see the Lord. In this point of view, and in no other, can we safely and piously contemplate our own personal holiness as a ground of confidence towards God. Of ourselves we are unable to do a good deed, or to think a holy thought. Yet if God has enabled us, in answer to our honest entreaties for light and aid, to obey his commandments, imperfectly indeed, yet zealously and diligently, this is a result of our faith, and an effect of his grace, which we are permitted to regard with thankful pleasure; and to consider it as furnishing fresh motives to prayer, and fresh grounds of assurance that our prayers will be heard. *In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee, for thou wilt answer me.*

Another ground, upon which David urges the acceptance of his prayers, is his trust in God: *O thou, my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.* It is obvious, that he who does not

trust in God, does not believe that he will hear him when he prays; and that is a frame of mind which is utterly inconsistent with fervour, and earnestness, and importunity in prayer. A want of trust in God, as a hearer of prayer, is the great cause of formality and coldness: and it punishes itself; for the very suspicion, that God will not listen to our prayers, will prevent them from being answered by him. Nothing more decisive can be said, of the indispensableness of an undoubting reliance upon the divine goodness, than that promise of our blessed Lord, *All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive*: a promise, which indeed related, in the first instance, to those special interferences of divine power, by which the Gospel was to be miraculously propagated through the world; but which places the necessity of faith in a very striking point of view. If faith was requisite, to the obtaining even of those spiritual gifts, without which the Apostles could not have executed their commission; it cannot be less requisite, for obtaining an answer to those prayers which relate to a far less important object.

But here it is necessary to shut the door against enthusiasm. The trust in God, which ought to be felt by every one who approaches him in

prayer, is surely not a persuasion that he will answer *every* petition which may be presented to him ; or that he will answer *any*, in the precise way which the petitioner may think proper to point out : but a belief that he will forgive the ignorance which prays amiss, and give us those good things which we know not how to ask ; while he withholds from us all that may be injurious to our final interests, however earnestly we may pray for it. To expect that God should determine any particular question, in answer to prayer ; or that he should supply any particular want, in the mode which we ourselves desire, is to expect that he will interpose a special providence in our behalf, and submit the comprehensiveness of his wisdom to the narrowness of our limited and fallible understanding ; at the same time superseding the use of reason, which he has given us for a guide and counsellor, and which he will strengthen and enlighten, but not constrain or nullify, by the influences of his Spirit.

But there is still another ground, upon which David strengthens his prayer, and urges its acceptance with God ; the consideration, that it is not a sudden and extraordinary overflowing of a devout spirit, but its habitual expression : *Be*



*merciful unto me, O Lord, for I cry unto thee daily.* Since *out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh,*<sup>5</sup> where the spirit of prayer is, there will be frequency, as well as fervency, in giving utterance to it. It is a spirit which cannot slumber, nor be restrained. It is awakened and invigorated by a sense of sin, of helplessness, of ignorance. It is encouraged and animated by a recollection of God's promises, of his covenanted assurances. Equally inconsistent with a spirit of pride and with a spirit of carelessness, it rests not upon the false security of self-righteousness, nor is benumbed by the lethargy of an engrossing worldly-mindedness: but is ever alert, and looking out towards God. It prevents the night watches with holy meditations and pious vows; measuring the lapse of time by the stated returns of its communings with Him who inhabiteth eternity; keeping its appointments with God; knowing that he waits for it at the times of its refreshing. There can be no question, but that prayer is as necessary to the spiritual sustentation and health of the soul, as food and clothing are to the body; and if no day can safely be suffered to pass, without paying a due attention to what we eat, and drink, and put on, none certainly ought to elapse

<sup>5</sup> Matt. xii. 34.

unsanctified and unblessed by prayer. Assuredly it was not without a pregnant signification, that our Lord directed us, in his own simple but comprehensive model of prayer, to acknowledge, by implication, the necessity of a daily recurrence to the giver of all good gifts: *give us this day our daily bread.* The resurrection of the visible world from the grave of night, and again the departure of the cheerful day, marked by sensible admonitions and invitations to repose, so naturally lead the way to devout thoughts and aspirations, that he, who prays at all, must at least pray then. Unholy is the diligence, and unblessed are the slumbers of those, who *rise up early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows,*<sup>6</sup> yet mark not the commencement and the close of their daily intercourse with the creatures, by a solemn act of homage to the Creator. *When I cry unto God, he will hear:* such is the language of confiding piety: but who dares to use it? He who can add, *evening, and morning, and at noon will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice.*<sup>7</sup>

And this reminds us, that another, and an indispensable ground of confidence is, an earnest perseverance in prayer. Earnestness and perse-

<sup>6</sup> Ps. cxxvii. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. lv. 17.

verance necessarily go together. In the Psalm, which we are now considering, the expression, *I cry unto thee daily*, is also interpreted, *I cry unto thee all the day*. Our Saviour taught his disciples, that men *ought to pray always*, that is, perseveringly, *and not to faint*;<sup>a</sup> and instructed them, by the parable of the unjust judge, that God will give to pious importunity, that which he withholds from the desultory petitions of the careless, or the hasty expostulations of the impatient. Very emphatic are the expressions of St. James; *the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*. The word which is translated *effectual*, means properly, assiduously working. To be availing, therefore, the prayer must be the prayer of a righteous, that is, a sanctified heart; it must be fervent; and it must be persevering. Still more pointed is the expression of St. Paul to the Colossians; *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always striving [or wrestling] for you in prayer*. Yet this importunity, this fervency, this striving, are all consistent with the most unre-served submission, the most perfect patience and resignation. *Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes*

<sup>a</sup> Luke xviii. 1.

*of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; even so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.*<sup>9</sup>—*O my Father, if it be possible,*<sup>10</sup> was the fervent, earnest prayer of an agonized spirit: yet how was it concluded? *nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

The last motive to confidence, which I shall notice, is the past experience of God's mercy. *Great is thy mercy towards me; and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.*

If we have been accustomed to seek the Lord in prayer, we can scarcely have failed to notice the returns which he has made to it; not always such as we expected, oftentimes widely different: but generally such, as to manifest the hand of an all-wise and all-merciful Father, controlling and directing the movements of our ignorance and infirmity, and shaping the course of events to our good. There is no man amongst us, who cannot look back to deliverances from apprehended evil, and to contingencies of unexpected good; and there is no man, who will presume to say, that he either deserved by his goodness, or was enabled by his wisdom, to avoid the one, or to obtain the other. If these effects of the divine goodness have been vouchsafed in answer to our prayers,

<sup>9</sup> Ps. cxxiii. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. xxvi. 39.

they furnish an obvious ground of confidence in our renewed approaches to the mercy-seat of God. If they have been freely bestowed upon us, without our seeking them, are they not signs and tokens, that the Lord only waiteth to be called upon, to give us a still larger and more effectual measure of what is really good for us? He does indeed *give to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.*<sup>11</sup> *He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*<sup>12</sup> His providence comprehends, within the scope of its bounty, even the thoughtless and the ungrateful: but his most precious gifts, the gifts of spiritual wisdom, and grace, and holiness, he giveth only *to them that ask him*: yet his bountifulness in the one case is a proof that he will readily listen in the other.

Such, my brethren, are some of the motives to prayer, by which the faithful servants of God have been animated and consoled in all ages of his Church; such the methods by which he appears to stretch out the arm of his paternal goodness, and to draw his helpless, erring creatures to a near and familiar communion with himself. To say that all these motives subsist in their full force, and are applicable to those who live under

<sup>11</sup> James i. 5.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. v. 45.

the Christian covenant, is not enough. Every one of them is enhanced, and strengthened, and made more influential, by the peculiar disclosures and promises of the Gospel. The divine goodness has been embodied and personified in Jesus Christ. God himself has *dwelt among us, full of grace and truth*. Is humility an ingredient in the spirit of prayer? Christ has taught us the sinfulness of sin, the true grounds of humility, and its rewards. Is a holy confidence required? We have his promise, *Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.*<sup>13</sup> Do we demand a proof of the divine love? *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*<sup>14</sup> Must we have some assurance of the future mercies of God, from those which are past? All the grounds of assurance are summed up and absorbed in this, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*<sup>15</sup>

If a still further encouragement be needed, we have it in the certainty, that our great High Priest, who is entered into the holy place on our behalf, now intercedes for us at the right

<sup>13</sup> John xvi. 23.<sup>14</sup> John iii. 16.<sup>15</sup> Rom. viii. 32.

hand of God. *It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*<sup>16</sup> Let us endeavour to obtain such a view of our Redeemer in that place of glory, and that office of mercy, as may animate our languid devotion, and cause us to delight in prayer. Let us contemplate him in that heavenly abode, where he is now waiting to hear, and to receive us; where he is now interceding for us; from whence he sends forth the influences of his Spirit upon those who are met together in his name; to help their infirmities; to give earnestness and intensity to their prayers; to sanctify their hearts; to preserve them unblamable in soul and body; and to exalt them, through all the degrees of holiness, to that place of light and glory where he himself is set down with the Father.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Rom. viii. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. iii. 21.

# SERMON XI.

HUMILITY AND CONTRITION.

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ISAIAH LVII. 15.

*Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.*

ONE of the most striking features in the Scriptures of the Old Testament is, the contrast which their inspired writers are continually labouring to mark, with great strength and sublimity of expression, between the Creator and his creatures; between the majesty of God and the meanness of man. This is particularly observable in the prophecies and the Psalms, which contain many descriptions of the supreme power and glory of the Most High, and of the immeasurable difference between him and the most



exalted of created beings, incomparably more just and noble, than the most splendid passages of heathen poetry or philosophy. And this, although not of itself a decisive proof of the inspiration of Scripture, is yet a collateral evidence of no inconsiderable weight. There is this remarkable difference between those writings which we receive as the word of God, and all others which have professed to declare to mankind the great truths of religion, as deduced from other sources ; that while these have attempted to elevate man to something like an equality with his Creator, or to bring down the Deity to the level of human understanding and affections, the Scriptures uniformly represent the Almighty Maker of the universe, as transcending, by infinite degrees, the proudest of those who call themselves lords of the creation ; as dwelling in glory, unapproachable even to human imagination ; and as clothed with attributes, of which the most consummate perfections of human nature are scarcely the faint shadows and resemblances. This peculiarity, which distinguishes the authentic records of inspiration, becomes more striking, when it is viewed in combination with another remarkable feature ; that the power and majesty of God are thus exalted, and the comparative meanness

and insignificance of man contrasted with them, not for the purpose of exciting an abject terror and despondency in the inferior being, but rather for the purposes of encouragement and consolation. God is magnified, and man is disparaged in the Word of Revelation, in order that the latter may be driven, by a sense of his own worthlessness and insufficiency, to take refuge in the supremacy and excellency of an all-perfect Being; whereas the aim of natural religion, under all its shapes, has been this,—to persuade mankind that they possess the art of securing for themselves the favour and protection of God, by the exercise of their own moral perfections; and to persuade them, in defiance of the admonitions of conscience, which loudly proclaim to every accountable and imperfect being, that he deserves punishment, and if left to himself, must encounter it. In a word, all other systems of religion are calculated to cherish and gratify the pride of man; that which is contained in the Bible beats it down. All other systems strive to exalt the dignity of human nature; this reduces it to nothing: but it does so, in order that it may, by the very process of humiliation, be instrumental in restoring it to that true dignity, from which it has fallen, and in which it

is the object of religion to replace it. The great end of all religion must be, to teach and enable mankind to secure the favour of God. False religion has taught them, that this is to be accomplished by costly sacrifices, and splendid rites of worship; and by the ostentatious display of personal virtues; true religion declares, that her excellency and efficacy lie in lowliness of heart; that they are in effect the nearest to God, who are most deeply sensible of their infinite distance from him; and that the first and most indispensable step towards their obtaining his mercy, is to feel, in the very depths of their soul, how richly they deserve his wrath.

These divine truths, although they were continually repeated by the inspired messengers of God, as the fundamental and vital part of religion, were but imperfectly understood, and too often entirely forgotten by the Jewish people; who were, not unnaturally perhaps, disposed to place the substance of religion in the observance of their prescribed ritual; and to overlook and omit *the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.*<sup>1</sup> The false interpretations of their teachers, their hypocrisy, and worldly-mindedness, went nigh to obliterate, from the

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 23.

minds of that people, all just and worthy notions of God, and of the service which they owed him: and therefore the Spirit, speaking by the prophet, commanded the teachers of the people, first to remove these obstacles, which opposed the admission of divine truth; and then to recall their attention to its first principles, at once awful and consolatory. *Cast ye up; cast ye up; prepare the way; take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people. For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Such a description as this, I boldly say, carries, upon the face of it, the marks of a divine original. Human wisdom, and human piety, uninformed by the Spirit of God, would have been alike unequal to form so sublime a combination of the majesty and condescension of Jehovah. His descent, from the glories of his eternal habitation, into the heart of a sinful creature, is an image, which, while it carries conviction to the soul, by meeting all its wants, would never have occurred spontaneously to the imagination of a conscious sinner.

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.* Such is the language of faith, under both the Old and New Covenant: but the people of God, under the former dispensation, did not understand the *reason* of that merciful compassion, which led the high and the holy One to regard a humble and penitent heart as his chosen temple, and his choicest sacrifice. *We* possess additional motives to humility, and fresh materials of joy, in the knowledge, that God so loves and condescends to the contrite ones, because for them his beloved Son first determined upon, and afterwards accomplished, the sacrifice of himself upon the cross. If self-abasement, and self-renunciation, and self-condemnation were required in an Israelite, as a necessary preparation for the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, they must be at least equally necessary to Christians, who understand more clearly the nature and extent of sin, and the moving cause of God's condescension and mercy.

Without the certain promises of Revelation, we can have no assurance of finding favour with God. If there be a supreme ruler of the world, he must be holy and just. The justice of God is concerned in avenging his holiness, and in

punishing every offence against it: this is a truth, which conscience persists in repeating, by whatever sophistry a corrupt reason may disguise or conceal it. That we are not perfectly righteous, that we offend against the light of nature, as well as the declared will of God, no man will be found to deny. The consequence is too plain to be eluded; we must perish in our iniquities. Yet God is merciful as well as just: but how to reconcile the exercise of his mercy with the claims of his justice, we cannot tell. We know that we are transgressors, and deserve his wrath; but how to escape it? Of that we can have, by nature, but a vague, and trembling, and unsatisfactory hope.

In this perplexity, the natural man inquires, with the anxiety of one who feels that he is accountable, and knows that he is a defaulter, what are the methods and the means of conciliating the favour of God, and of obtaining those consolatory assurances, which the spirit of a man longeth and thirsteth after, and which the Spirit of God can alone supply. The Spirit of God alone can answer the inquiry; *I dwell with the contrite and humble.* Humility, then, is the indispensable preliminary to a spiritual communion with God. If there be no genuine

humility, no real contrition, no prostration of the heart, God will not dwell with it; and if God be not with us by his Spirit, we can have no fellowship with his Son; no taste of reconciliation; no revival of hope; no restoration of comfort; but must remain *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt;*<sup>3</sup> as proud and rebellious, as impure and as unquiet. It concerns us very nearly, therefore, to inquire into the nature of this humility and contrition, which are thus made the prerequisites of religious comfort and confidence.

The foundation of them, and therefore of the whole religious character, is, a sense of sin. By a sense of sin, I mean, not merely an apprehension of the offensive nature of sin in general, but a conviction of our own sinfulness in particular. No person, who has even a vague and imperfect notion of the relation in which he stands to God, can be ignorant of the odiousness of sin. Every page of the volume of revelation declares it to be highly displeasing to God; the concurrent testimony of the wise and good, in all ages of the world, pronounces it to be odious to the better part of mankind; experience teaches him that it is injurious, if not utterly ruinous to

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah lvii. 20.

himself. Of all this he may be thoroughly persuaded; and he may further believe, on the evidence of God's Word, that sin disqualifies a man for admission into that kingdom, into which *there shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth.*<sup>3</sup> But all this reaches no further than to a speculative sense of sin. It is the personal application of these truths, by each individual, to his own particular case, the realizing of them in his own feelings and convictions, which constitutes a practical and soul humbling sense of sin; such a sense as our Saviour supposes to be effectually perceived by the true penitent; *Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden.* Whatever notion we may entertain of the effects of sin upon our spiritual relation to God, we shall not feel its oppressiveness, till we have experienced its weight upon our own souls. The word *contrition* means a bruising and breaking; and although a general persuasion of the mischief and evil of sin may affect the heart with tender feelings, and lead the way to holy wishes; it can never be contrite, bruised and broken, except by an overpowering sense of its own sinfulness. The Jews, who listened to the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, were doubtless

<sup>3</sup> Rev. xxi. 27.



not ignorant of the dangerous nature of sin: they could not be ignorant of that which was interwoven in the whole texture of their Scriptures: but it was not till the powerful and searching eloquence of the Apostle had convicted their consciences of sin in their own persons, that they were *pricked in their hearts*, and exclaimed, with all the earnestness of a genuine contrition, *Men and brethren, what shall we do?*<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, it too often requires almost the eloquence and authority of an Apostle, to lead men to this conviction. It is a conviction, to which the pride and the passions of human nature set themselves in vehement opposition; and which is contradicted by the language and the habits of the world, and that conventional measure of goodness which the children of this world have adopted, as the rule of their conduct and their judgments. It is here that our chief difficulty lies, as preachers of the Gospel; in bringing our hearers to a sense of sin; of the nature of sin in general; and of their own in particular. Until we succeed in laying this foundation, we shall labour in vain to raise the superstructure of Christian faith and practice.

It is in vain that we talk to our hearers of

<sup>4</sup> Acts ii. 37.

the necessity of repentance, and a turning to God, and a seeking for grace, unless there be first wrought in them a sense of sin. Observe how St. Paul laboured this point, with the self-righteous Jew, and with the profane or careless Gentile. How did he seek to prepare them for reconciliation with God? By convincing them that they were condemned and perishing sinners. He strove to win them over to the hope full of joy, which was in Jesus Christ, by setting before them, in the liveliest colours, the utter forfeiture which they had incurred, of all right and title to the inheritance of the children of God.

This, then, is the groundwork of Christian humility. If we were perfectly sinless, exact in the discharge of every appointed duty, doing the will of God as it is done in heaven; we ought, even then, to be humble; even then we should be only what God has made us, the creatures of his power, the instruments of his will; still placed at a distance below him, greater than that which separates man from the meanest insect of creation. But if, when we have done all that is commanded us, were that possible, we are still to acknowledge ourselves unprofitable, and therefore unworthy servants; what ought to be the depths of our humility, when, in fact, we do nothing as

it ought to be done? I am not now speaking of the mere carnal man, or the openly ungodly man, but of the professed servant of God; nay, of the *sincere* servant of God: for is there one of our actions, in which, if it be scrutinized with the eye of calm unbiassed piety, we shall not detect some taint of human corruption, some defect of natural infirmity? There is, as it were, a thread of sinfulness woven into, and running through the whole texture of our conduct; the inwrought stain of which may be washed out by the blood of the Lamb, but which, during our mortal life, is *there*, and intrinsically vitiates our moral character. Of those, who outwardly profess religion, how many are there that perform the acts of religion in such a manner, as fully to answer the requirements of that perfect revelation, which teaches them that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and truth? Who is there that always prays to him as he ought to pray; with an entire abstractedness from secular cares and considerations, with a stedfast reliance upon his goodness, and with an absolute and unreserved submission to his will? In the best actions of the best of men, there is enough of sinfulness to shut out boasting; and to humble the holiest saint before Him

who is holiness itself. What, then, is the state of the formalist, who satisfies himself with the decencies and proprieties of religion, and congratulates himself upon being at least as good as other men, and perhaps somewhat better; who, because he is addicted to no scandalous vice, commits no gross infraction of the acknowledged laws of morality and honour, performs his devotions at stated periods, and honours God with a certain portion of his substance, regards his own religious character with complacency, if not with pride; and is altogether ignorant of that inward self-humiliation, that deep afflicting sense of sin, which causes the heart, as it were, to die within itself, and to long, *with groanings which cannot be uttered*, for the reviving influences of the Spirit. Yet without this overpowering conviction of our own unholiness and unworthiness, there is no vital religion; no religion, that is, which contains in itself the principle of life, or which can make us intimately and savingly acquainted with the redeeming love of God.

It is obvious, that such a sense of sin, as I have here described, is almost synonymous with a renunciation of all intrinsic worthiness and merit in ourselves. We cannot at one and the same time deserve at the hands of God both

punishment and reward. But that we deserve punishment, is on all sides acknowledged; it is a truth which lies at the very root of religion; it is the very principle and first moving cause of the Gospel dispensation. But the notion of a meritorious obedience on our parts, is for ever excluded, by our Saviour's emphatic words, *When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which was our duty to do.*<sup>a</sup> We can, therefore, put no confidence in our very best works, as having in themselves any meritorious quality, any justifying efficacy; but our continual suit to God must be, that he will bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences: *We have sinned against heaven and before thee, and are no more worthy to be called thy sons! Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight no man living shall be found righteous.* I may, perhaps, *know nothing by myself*, that is, I may be conscious to myself of no offence against the pure and perfect law of holiness; *yet*, said even an Apostle, *am I not hereby justified.*<sup>b</sup>

Such, then, are the first preparations of the heart, to fit it for the habitation of Him, who,

<sup>a</sup> Luke xvii. 10.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 4.

although he is the high and the holy One, and inhabiteth eternity, as the Lord and Ruler of the universe, yet delights to dwell upon earth, in the contrite and humble heart, and to revive it with the present influences of his Spirit, and the promises of eternal life. It was probably with reference to these sublime and spiritual descriptions of the prophets, that our Saviour declared, and by his declaration embodied them in the Gospel covenant, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*<sup>7</sup> Humility is the very theme of the Gospel. It is the peculiar lesson which our Lord invited all men to learn of him; *take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.*<sup>8</sup> *Blessed are the poor in spirit,* for theirs is the temper and frame of mind, which qualify them, first for the reception of the Gospel, and then for the exemplification of its precepts; for the indwelling of the Spirit, and for the manifestation of his gifts; for admission into that kingdom of grace, which is an introduction to the kingdom of glory. Again, *Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.* This promise is the very counterpart of that in the text; *I dwell, saith the Lord, with him that is of a contrite and humble*

<sup>7</sup> Matt. v. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. xi. 29.

*spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.* Blessed are they that mourn; not outwardly, in acts of fasting and penance, as the Pharisees did, by way of expiating their transgressions; but inwardly, *rending their hearts, and not their garments.* They who mourn for their sins, for the loss of righteousness, and for the imperfection and unprofitableness of their own endeavours to regain it; for the displeasure of God, and the jeopardy of their own souls: these are blessed, in the sure results of their godly sorrow; as the hardened, senseless sinner is truly miserable, although he knows it not, in his spiritual lethargy and apathy. Sorrow for sin is an argument, that the principle of life is within us; and is, therefore, matter of joy. The Christian grieves, and rejoices that he can grieve; and thus, *they that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*<sup>9</sup>

It only remains, that I should press upon you the obvious conclusion to be drawn from the words of the text, thus explained; that since the Lord *hath respect only to the lowly, while the proud he knoweth afar off;*<sup>10</sup> since contrition of heart, and humility of spirit, under a sense of sin, are the attractive forces, which bring him down

<sup>9</sup> Ps. cxxvi. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. cxxxviii. 6.

from the throne of his glory into the fleshly tabernacle of a sinner's breast ; our first and most earnest endeavour ought to be, to obtain a clearer and more awakening view of our own sinfulness, that we may be able to say, in the spirit, not of despondency, but of meekness, *my sin is ever before me.*<sup>11</sup> But this is to be effected by the grace of God, vouchsafed in answer to prayer, *Who can understand his errors ? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*<sup>12</sup> We must not remain contented with a general and speculative abhorrence of sin ; but again and again contemplate its defilement in our own persons, and the fearful denunciations of God's wrath against unhumbled and impenitent sinners, till we are fully sensible of our own individual danger, and reduced to cry out in anguish, *O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?*<sup>13</sup>

This it is, and surely nothing short of this, to be "grieved and wearied with the burthen of our sins." But how inconsistent is this with every shade of dissipation, and frivolity, and carelessness ; much more with every vicious indulgence, and with a devotion to the things that are in the world. And yet it is by no

<sup>11</sup> Ps. li. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. xix. 12.

<sup>13</sup> Rom. vii. 24.



means inconsistent with a tranquil and considerate cheerfulness ; for it is the very disposition and posture of heart, to which the Lord has promised his reviving grace, and that inward, imperturbable peace which he gives, *not as the world giveth*,<sup>14</sup> and which the world, and all the powers of the world, can never take away.

May He, who came to call—not the righteous, the self-confident, the presumptuous—but sinners, humble, contrite sinners, to repentance and remission of sins, enable us, by his grace, to experience the truth of these difficult, but comfortable doctrines, in our own hearts. May he first convince us of sin, and then cleanse us from its stain ; and sanctify us both soul and body by his Spirit ; and deliver us from the curse of the law, and from the extreme malediction which shall light upon them that shall be set on his left hand at the great day of account !

<sup>14</sup> John xiv. 27.

## SERMON XII.

CHRISTIAN COURAGE AND CONSISTENCY.



2 COR. VI. 14.

*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ;  
for what fellowship hath righteousness with unright-  
eousness ? and what communion hath light with dark-  
ness ? and what concord hath Christ with Belial ? or  
what part hath he that believeth, with an infidel ?*

THE earlier converts to Christianity, both amongst the Jews and Gentiles, were placed in circumstances of great difficulty and perplexity, independently of the direct persecution which they were frequently called upon to encounter. Their natural affections and sympathies were severely tried, by the sacrifice of friendship, and the interruption of domestic happiness, which were the inevitable consequences of their slighting the ceremonial observances of the law, or

forsaking those heathen superstitions, to which their friends and relations still adhered. It was the obstinacy of human corruption and infirmity, and no defect in the Gospel dispensation, which brought about the fulfilment of our Saviour's melancholy prediction ; *Think not that I am come to send peace upon earth ; I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*<sup>1</sup> And sharp was that trial of a Christian's faith, which required him, when convinced of the truth as it was in Jesus, to relinquish and abjure, not merely the treasures of the world, or the conveniences of life, but the esteem and affection of those who were nearest and dearest to him, rather than shrink from the profession of his allegiance to Christ, and comply with their prejudices, to the dishonour and obstruction of the Gospel. *He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me ; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.*<sup>2</sup>

From a compliance with the inveterate partialities of their Jewish countrymen, in favour

<sup>1</sup> Matt. x. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. x. 37.

of the Mosaic ritual, not even the Apostles were entirely exempt. Paul rebuked Peter at Antioch, for having ceased to eat with the Gentile converts, *fearing them which were of the circumcision.*<sup>3</sup> But this error of judgment, although it had a tendency to keep alive, in the Jewish Christians, their unreasonable fondness for the exclusive precepts of the law, and consequently to depreciate the justifying efficacy of faith in Christ; did not involve any question between the one true God, and the false gods of the heathen world; between the service of Christ, and that of the prince of darkness. Far less excusable was the conduct of those converts, who, having been turned from *abominable idolatries, to serve the living God*, yet countenanced, by their presence or participation, the unholy rites and sacrifices of the heathen temples; and contracted marriages with unbelievers; and so endeavoured to combine, in an unnatural and unlawful alliance, the service of God with that of demons. This departure from the strait line of Christian integrity seems to have prevailed principally at Corinth, a rich and luxurious city, where the rites of idolatrous worship were celebrated with more than ordinary pomp and splendour, and

<sup>3</sup> Gal. ii. 12.

where, as the temptations to inconsistency were greater, there was the greater need of firm and uncompromising boldness on the part of the Christian believers, that the strength and the holiness of Gospel principles might suffer no impeachment, nor the sinfulness of idolatrous practices be palliated by their example.

*Take heed,* says the Apostle, in his first Epistle to the Christians at Corinth, *lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling-block to them that are weak; for if any man see thee, which hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened, to eat those things which are offered to idols? And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils; that is, with demons, the name under which the heathens spoke of their imaginary deities.* In the words of the text, he deprecates, more generally and more emphatically, this absurd and mischievous intermixture of Gospel truth and principles, with Pagan superstitions and Pagan practices; and tells them, that the yoke of Christ, which they had taken

upon them, was not of that convenient and accommodating kind, that it could be fitted at once to the believer and the infidel: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?* (i. e. with the type and representative of wickedness), *or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?*

What, then, was to be the conduct of these Corinthian Christians for the time to come? Were they permitted to temporize, for fear of offending the unconverted citizens of that dissolute place? Were they to insinuate, by a half compliance with their evil customs, by an obsequious compromise of truth and conscience, that the Gospel was not so irreconcilable with the prevalent belief and superstition, as its preachers had represented it to be? No: the Apostle requires an immediate and unhesitating secession from the ways and works of idolatry; a cutting off of all communion, save that which their duty to society rendered necessary, between the professors of the Gospel, and its enemies: *Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate,*

*saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*

Having thus explained this earnest dissuasive of St. Paul, let us now proceed to its general application. The objectionable practices, which the Apostle had more immediately in view, were, in all probability, the contracting of alliances between Christians and heathens; and the presence of believers at the idolatrous rites of pagan worship, or at least their partaking in the feasts which were made after sacrifice. But the reasons which he urges, to show the unlawfulness of such compliances, are general, and apply to a far wider range of conduct. The evils, which were likely to result from the inconsistency of the Corinthian Christians, were of a twofold kind. They exposed to great hazard their own integrity and faithfulness; and they scandalized and obstructed the progress of the Gospel, by appearing to sanction the gross errors of paganism. The dishonour done to the majesty of the true God, by such a seeming approval of the most heinous offence which could be committed against it, is so obvious, that we are disposed to wonder, that the authority of an Apostle should have been required to prevent it. But great is the force of inveterate habit, of popular opinion, of natural

affection; great, even to the obscuring, or extinguishing of the light of truth in the soul, and to suppressing the admonitions of conscience. No doubt there were persons at Corinth, who were ready to ply the weaker brethren with the customary argument of the worldly sophist; “Why so precise and particular? Why so severe upon the customs and opinions of your countrymen, nay, of your friends and kinsmen? Why condemn, by your rigid abstinence, practices and ceremonies which have been for ages past held sacred by the world, and which the world at large holds sacred still? True, you have embraced a new religion, are called by a new name, are enlisted under the banners of a new chief: but surely you may preserve your fidelity to him, without turning your back upon so many of your former companions and friends; without entirely deserting their society; and without refusing to join them in the forms of their religion, although you no longer hold it to be true.”

Perhaps, also, there were sophists, who argued, that as they acknowledged one supreme God, but worshipped also a number of subordinate deities, without any fear of offending him; so the Christians might, with still greater security, while they confined their acts of adoration to the one true



God, yet be present at the honours paid to the heathen deities, without exciting his jealousy or resentment. But the God of Christians, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a jealous God ; not permitting the least particle of the honour, due to him, to be paid to other gods ; not a hand to be lifted, nor a knee to be bowed, nor a lip to be moved, no, nor even a thought to be directed towards any other object of worship than himself. His service is exclusive. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*, was the precept of the Law. *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon*, is the declaration of the Gospel.

This fundamental truth of religion was of especial importance in the age of the Apostles, when there was a direct conflict between Christ and Belial, between the true religion of the Gospel, and the idolatrous errors of paganism. *The prince of this world*, said our Saviour, *hath nothing in me.*<sup>4</sup> The Son of God came upon earth for the express purpose of destroying the dominion of that evil one, and to cast him down from his high places ; to extinguish the fire upon his unhallowed altars ; to crush the abominations of his worship ; to rescue the souls of deluded

<sup>4</sup> John xiv. 30.

sinner from the grasp of his malignity. There could be no compromise between them ; no comprehension nor coalition of their respective followers ; but open hostility, a war without a truce ; irreconcilable enmity between the Saviour and the destroyer of souls. As impossible was it, according to St. Paul's illustration, that light should be coexistent with darkness in one and the same portion of space, as that permission should be given to the servants of Jesus to hold any religious intercourse with unbelievers and idolaters.

As far, therefore, as the honour of God, and of the true religion is concerned, it is manifest that the Apostle forbids all concessions and compliances on the part of Christians, which might seem to sanction or excuse, even by implication, the vain imaginations and profane rites of the heathens, who, when they *knew God, glorified him not as God, but changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.*<sup>5</sup> Whatsoever tended to produce a belief, that the eternal enmity between the Seed of the woman and the great deceiver was less than Jesus Christ had declared it to be ; whatsoever tended to uphold, even by the suffrage of approbation, or by the silence

<sup>5</sup> Rom. i. 21—25.

of consent, that ancient and gorgeous edifice of superstition and idolatry, the stronghold of Satan, which Jesus Christ came upon earth to destroy ; whatsoever tended to perpetuate error, or to palliate unholiness, was an act of treason against the sovereignty of God ; and, if committed consciously, was that sin, to be guilty of which is worse than to die the death. *Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*<sup>6</sup>

But the scandal, which was occasioned to the cause of the Gospel, was not the only evil resulting from a temporizing spirit in the Corinthian converts. Their own integrity and uprightness were placed in jeopardy ; if, indeed, such conduct were not an indication of their being already impaired and shaken. It is as improbable that a man should hold willing converse and commerce with impiety and ungodliness, and escape all moral injury, as it is, that one, who is predisposed to disease, should breathe the tainted atmosphere of a crowded lazar-house, and not take infection. Familiarity with sin, even the familiarity of the eye and the ear, if it does not

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xviii. 6.

breed attachment, at least diminishes repugnance. The most offensive object, contemplated day by day, ceases at length to be disgusting. The moral sensibility is blunted; the natural kindness of the heart lends its aid to blind the eye of reason; excuses are found for evil practices, which a slumbering or deluded conscience now condemns but faintly, then patiently tolerates, and at last permits. To those, therefore, of his servants, who have strayed beyond the boundary line between right and wrong, which is marked as with a sunbeam, in the revelation of God's will, his command was, under the law, *Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.*<sup>1</sup> Under the Gospel he says, *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

To all this will be given, no doubt, a ready and unhesitating assent. The dishonour done to God and Christ, and the spiritual danger brought upon themselves, by an apparent conformity, on the part of the first believers, with the rites of idolatry, and by too intimate a familiarity with infidels and scoffers, are so evident,

<sup>1</sup> Is. lii. 11.

that we can readily enter into the spirit of that animated exhortation, with which the Apostle dissuades them from compromising their allegiance. But we are not so easily brought to acknowledge its force, when applied to our own case; or indeed to admit that it is applicable at all. Yet the duties, which it enforces by implication, a jealousy for the honour of God and of his Gospel, and the preservation of Christian integrity, are duties of universal and perpetual importance; and as long as unbelief and ungodliness shall exist in the world, the careless Christian must be admonished against the spirit of weakness, or the treachery, which obstructed the cause of truth at Corinth.

But what danger, it may be asked, can there be, in the midst of a Christian country, where the Gospel is not only tolerated, but honoured and protected by the civil power; what danger can there be, or rather what possibility, of our incurring the same censure, which was pronounced upon the inconsistent Corinthians? Such a warning may well be given to those Christians, who reside in distant parts of the world, in the midst of heathen nations, and upon whom there is laid a special and peculiar obligation to avoid every thing which may

dishonour or obstruct the Gospel. It may be given still more emphatically to those, who are sent forth to preach that Gospel to idolatrous people: but it has no bearing upon us, who are far removed from all acquaintance and commerce with pagan superstition.

It must be confessed, that some teachers are too apt to make an unwarranted application of many directions and denunciations, both of our Lord and of the Apostles, without taking into their account the particular circumstances which called them forth, or the limitation of meaning which would result from considering the immediate end and intention with which they were delivered. No doubt, many forced interpretations have been put upon certain commands and prohibitions of our Saviour, which, in their literal strictness, related only to his immediate hearers and disciples; but which a rash and injudicious fanaticism has attempted to apply, with a rigid and impracticable straitness, to all Christians, in all ages of the Church. But the danger of mistaking, lies, for the most part, in the opposite direction. We are far more likely to confine the application of Christian doctrines and precepts within too narrow limits, than to interpret them in too comprehensive a sense; and there are few,

if any, of those impressive precepts and warnings, which the first believers heard from the mouth of the Lord Jesus himself, and his chosen messengers, the spirit of which does not concern us, with whatever degree of latitude we may explain the letter. In the instance before us, it is true that St. Paul had in view the intercourse between Christians and idolaters, and principally, though not solely, their intercourse in the offices and solemnities of religion. But he ascends from the particular case to the general principle, when he inquires, *What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? What concord hath Christ with Belial?* And surely these are questions, which may be applied, as a test of conduct, to every professor of the Gospel. If, in general, we are not called upon to take a part in the contest between Christianity and heathenism; yet there is a struggle between Christ and Belial, between the Lord of life and the prince of darkness, still waging in the world, even in the Christian world; and on one side or other we must be, nay, in point of fact, we are already engaged. We may not perhaps be aware of it; but we are all, yes, every individual amongst us, maintaining and setting forward the cause of

Christ, or that of Belial. Where the Gospel is professed, where the embassy of reconciliation and the law of holiness are proclaimed, there may be no neutrality; *he that is not with me is against me*, was the declaration of the great Captain of our salvation. On the one side are ranged the pious believer, the contrite penitent, the devout worshipper, the renouncer of worldly lusts and vanities, the exemplary liver, the consistent walker with God: these are Christ's. On the other side are, the professed unbeliever, the proud scoffer, the unblushing profligate, the selfish sensualist, the careless trifler, the neglecter of ordinances: these are all the servants of Belial, the children of this generation; and it is incumbent upon the former, as they value the honour of the Gospel, and desire to prove its efficacy, and to *walk worthy of their calling*, and to *adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour*; it is their duty, I say, to abstain from every compromise, or approximation, which may seem to obliterate or obscure the broad line of distinction, which ought to separate them from the children of the world.

The Christian's conduct should be of that distinctive and consistent kind, that he may always be *known* as a Christian. A secret preference



for the religion of Jesus Christ is not sufficient; it does not answer all the ends of discipleship. The very term, profession, implies an open and constant avowal of the faith which we have embraced. *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*<sup>9</sup> The Lord's people must not let it be surmised, from their conduct towards his adversaries, that their allegiance is wavering and unsteady, their abhorrence of sin less intense, their zeal for the honour of Christ less ardent, than is consistent with the perfect allegiance of a subject to his king, of a servant to his master, of a son to his father, of a rescued captive to his deliverer. If, therefore, our lot be cast amongst those, who are either open enemies and opposers of the Gospel, or outward professors in name, but notoriously disregarding and denying it in practice; with such it is our duty, as Christians, to have no further intercourse, than the necessary business and charities of life may render indispensable. We must not frequent their society, nor seek their conversation, unless it be with a view to advising and reclaiming them. We are not to hear them blaspheme, or scoff at holy things, without vindicating the cause of

<sup>9</sup> Rom. x. 10.

God as our own. We are not to give them the least reason for supposing that we approve of their principles, or their practice: but we are to declare, in every way consistent with Christian humility, and Christian patience, and Christian charity, that while we pity and pray for them, we renounce all fellowship, as with the works of darkness, so with the workers of them. It was a topic of commendation to the Church at Ephesus, not only that it had itself laboured in the work of the Gospel, but that it disliked and rejected the evil doers: *I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience; and how thou canst not bear them which are evil. This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.*<sup>o</sup>

Yet it may happen, that a pious and humble Christian will be perplexed and doubtful, as to the mode in which he shall mark, with sufficient decision, the part which he himself has chosen; and support, with proper firmness and constancy, the character of a believer, without transgressing any rule of charity, or interrupting the harmony of social life. Possibly an open rebuke, or even an earnest expostulation, under certain circumstances, may harden the sinful or careless man,

<sup>o</sup> Rev. ii. 2, 6.

instead of awakening and turning him. But the Apostle's direction may always be obeyed, without any breach of charity; and, in cases of gross and flagrant delinquency against the laws of God, it *must* be obeyed, even though the charities of life may seem to be violated: *Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.* To permit a mere diversity of opinion, between those who are agreed in acknowledging Christ for their Saviour, to interrupt the charities of social and even domestic life; to break off a friendly intercourse with those who profess to be Christians as well as ourselves,—and who, if mistaken, are sincere,—because they differ from us in their views of some particular doctrine, or feature of the Gospel dispensation; this is not firmness and consistency, but conceit and uncharitableness: it is to fulfil a doubtful obligation, at the expense of a known duty. But to separate himself from profane or profligate men, and to let them see that the separation is deliberately made, in order to mark, by the consistent tenor of his own conduct, the difference between his own principles and theirs, is a practical sentence of condemnation, which the most charitable Christian need

not hesitate to pass upon the enemies, or the despisers of his Saviour.

But such a proceeding, it may be said, will bring upon us the charge of peculiarity; we shall be regarded as aliens and strangers from the rest of mankind, and looked upon with suspicion and jealousy. Well, and ought it not to be so with Christians? Must it not be so, as long as the world is divided into two classes, the children of light, and the children of this generation? As long as we persevere in the line of duty, marked out for us by him, whose servants we profess to be, and, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*, we shall be esteemed singular and precise, by those who follow a more lax and accommodating rule. Such is the very nature and character of our calling; for he, who has called us, *gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*; <sup>10</sup> that is, peculiarly his own, marked as such, and known to be so, by the stamp of holiness, which distinguishes them from the world; the name of God and of the Lamb being written on their foreheads. <sup>11</sup> And as to the suspicion

<sup>10</sup> Tit. ii. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. xiv. 1.

and dislike, which our fidelity to Christ may bring upon us, for that we have been prepared long ago : *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.*<sup>12</sup> We are secure of the love and esteem of those who are sincere in their Christian profession ; the censure of others may be regarded as a cause of satisfaction rather than regret. *Wherefore, asks the Apostle, did Cain slay his brother ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*<sup>13</sup> *If ye were of the world, said our blessed Lord, the world would love its own : but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.*<sup>14</sup>

Miserable is his weakness, who, knowing what his duty to God requires, abstains from doing it, not under the overpowering constraint of natural appetite, and the irresistible force of temptation, but from a sense of shame ; from a self-condemned slavery to the opinions of a wicked world. Well would it be for us, if at the moment when a false delicacy, or a morbid fear of ridicule, exerts its influence, in opposition to the dictates of conscience, and the plain commands of God, we could remember, with a sure conviction of its truth, that awful warning of

<sup>12</sup> 1 John iii. 13.<sup>13</sup> 1 John iii. 12.<sup>14</sup> John xv. 19.

the Lord, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels.*

Let us, then, pray for a larger measure of spiritual courage and consistency. Let us dare to be uniformly and at all times Christian; in language, in demeanour, in charitable and edifying conversation; desirous, not only of securing our own salvation, but of setting forward the honour of Christ, and the growth of holiness in the world; as jealous for the credit of his Gospel, as though it depended wholly upon ourselves; and witnessing such a good confession before men, that the Redeemer may hereafter confess us before his Father which is in heaven.

## SERMON XIII.

CHRISTIAN IMPROVEMENT.



PROV. IV. 18.

*The path of the just is as the shining light; that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

THE shining light, which is here spoken of, is evidently the sun: and the path, or progress of the righteous man is beautifully compared to the daily course of that glorious luminary, who cometh out of his chambers in the east, dispersing gradually the shades of night, and gladdening the earth with continual accessions of light, from the first faint glimmering of the dawn, to the full splendour of the perfect day. The comparison bespeaks a just acquaintance, on the part of the sacred writer, with the intellectual faculties and moral powers of man, and

of the purposes for which both were implanted in him by his Maker. Indeed, a knowledge of the constitution of our nature, involves an acquaintance with some of the great ends of our existence, and, consequently, of our duties to the Creator. If we discover that our faculties and affections are susceptible of improvement, we may infer, with confidence, that God intended them to be improved. And on this point, as, indeed, on all, when it is rightly understood, religion speaks the same language as reason. Revelation assures us that we are placed here in an imperfect state, in progress to a better ; that we are not only capable of great improvement, but that it is the very end and object of our existence ; and that without it, we disappoint the gracious purposes of God. It is impossible, it is not in the nature of things, that a created being should attain to absolute perfection. *None is good save one, that is God.*<sup>1</sup> The highest and the holiest of created intelligences is by many degrees short of faultlessness. *Yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight.*<sup>2</sup> There is only one perfect, the eternal, the infinite, the incomprehensible source and cause of all things. Yet I suppose that no man will venture to lay down

<sup>1</sup> Luke xviii. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Job xv. 15.



a precise limit, at which the improvement of mankind shall stop, and beyond which it shall be impossible to carry it. One thing is certain; that there never has been, nor ever will be, any mere man so perfect in every respect, as to make it impossible to conceive any thing human more perfect still: for certainly no man does ever in reality avail himself, to the full extent, of all those resources and aids, with which God has provided him, for the improvement of his understanding, affections, and habits.

With regard to the intellectual powers and capacities of man, the experience of every succeeding age abundantly proves, how unsafe it is to assign the limit of their progressive improvement and enlargement. What an infinite variety of natural truths are now familiarly known to the great mass of mankind, which formerly baffled even the researches of the philosopher; and how many errors and delusions are now exploded, and almost forgotten, which were once considered as indubitable truths. Each succeeding age possesses all the knowledge of that which went before; and fresh materials for its further augmentation. And as new generations surpass the former, so in the same age, individuals excel one another, according

to the use which they make of the advantages which they possess. Two persons, with the same natural talents, with the same advantages of education, the same faculties of obtaining knowledge, but with different degrees of diligence, shall be as widely apart after a few years, as the faithful and the slothful servants in the parable. And surely no one can deny, that he, who has carefully improved his talents, of whatever description and value they may have been, has answered the purposes of his being more fully, than he who has suffered his to lie uncultivated and unproductive.

These principles are still more applicable to the moral condition of man; inasmuch as the objects aimed at are more valuable, the means of attaining them more certain, and the neglect of them far more pernicious. It may not be, and in many cases, it is not in our power to make any great advances in what is commonly called knowledge: and there are even some situations, in which a high degree of intellectual refinement might possibly become a source of disquietude and misery to its possessor. But this never can be the case with the improvement of the heart and affections. Under no imaginable circumstances can it fail to benefit

a man, to increase his happiness, to render him more fit for eternity.

Another argument is this. Upon looking into the state of our own hearts, we are sensible that all is not as it should be: there is something wrong; there is a struggle between conscience and inclination, which a reasonable being ought not to feel. There is a preponderance of evil influence and energy, which could not have been directly intended by a holy and merciful Creator. We could not have been made so at the first: there is then something to be rectified. And we uniformly find, that in proportion as we apply ourselves to that end, we improve our happiness, we mitigate the violence of the struggle between the conflicting parts of our nature, and insure tranquillity of mind. It is evident then, that our Creator expects us to go on from step to step in the work of self-improvement; because he desires the happiness of his reasonable creatures; and this is a sure way of promoting it. That he expects this endeavour at our hands, is also sufficiently plain, from his having attached to it its peculiar and inseparable rewards. Every degree of self-improvement is succeeded by a more than proportionate increase of happiness. The first successful resistance,

made to the principle of evil within, is like the first glimmering of the dawn upon the outskirts of the morning : each succeeding triumph, of religion over sin, spreads fresher and brighter beams of light upon the soul ; till at length it attains the meridian fulness of the perfect day.

Thus far we have considered the question upon general grounds. If there be a God at all, what I have said must be true : but I recollect that I am reasoning with Christians, and that I have far higher and nobler topics of persuasion than these. I have something to argue from, of more sacred and unquestionable authority than the volume of nature, inscribed as it is, in every page, with the indelible traces of God's power and goodness, man's weakness, and his duties. I have the Word ; the revealed will of God ; the law and the testimony. To that we appeal ; and tell the Christian that with him the case is clear : he at least must be continually in progress to perfection. That important truth, which reason and conscience suggest, and all analogy confirms, that man is placed in this life, to be gradually improved by trials and labours, is fully established by revelation. As Christians we are quite sure, that our life ought to be a state of constant advancement from one degree of

goodness to another. We are commanded to be *perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect* ;<sup>3</sup> a precept, which, as it never can be fulfilled to the letter, obviously implies a continued endeavour to advance nearer and more near to the standard of divine perfection. We are directed to *grow in grace and knowledge* ;<sup>4</sup> to *press forward* ;<sup>5</sup> to *run the race that is set before us* ;<sup>6</sup> to *let patience have her perfect work* ; that we may be *perfect and entire, wanting nothing* ;<sup>7</sup> wanting nothing of that excellence which is attainable by the Christian in this present imperfect state.

It is sometimes urged by the carnal-minded and the indolent, as an objection to the precepts of our blessed Lord, that they are impracticable ; that the literal and exact performance of them surpasses the natural powers of man, even when aided by the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit. Suppose it to be so ; what we ought to infer from it is this ; that our Saviour lays down the perfect rule of right, and commands us to use our utmost endeavours, and to approach as near to it as our imperfections, remedied and supplied as they may be by the

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 48.<sup>4</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 18.<sup>5</sup> Phil. iii. 14.<sup>6</sup> Heb. xii. 1. 1 Cor. ix. 24.<sup>7</sup> James i. 4.

grace of God, will permit. And this is a very important consideration: it vindicates the Gospel as a practical rule of life; and it necessarily implies an obligation upon all Christians, to be continually in an improving state. If the standard proposed to us *be* really unattainable in this life, yet no man can tell how nearly he may approach to it; and therefore it is clearly incumbent upon every one, to come as near to it as he can. This can only be done by degrees.

Yes, some person perhaps will say, it may be done all at once, by the operation of divine grace. It *may* be done, certainly; for whatever is possible in the nature of things, may be done by the power of God. But there is no reason to believe that it ever *is* done. For it is quite unreasonable to imagine, that the Almighty will interpose an extraordinary influence to accomplish that, which may be achieved by the ordinary dispensations of his providence and goodness. In this particular case we are sure that he does not. He was pleased to convert St. Paul by a special miracle; but was that great Apostle, from the moment of his call, fixed in the highest attainable degree of Christian perfection? Not if we are to believe his own account of himself. He speaks of the pains which he took, *lest that by*

*any means, when he had preached to others, he himself should be a castaway.*<sup>8</sup> And although he had suffered the loss of all things for Jesus Christ;<sup>9</sup> and was fixed, if any man ever was, in the true saving faith; yet so far was he from imagining that he was as good as he might be, or that he was exempted from the necessity of continually improving himself, that he says, *Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after; if that I may apprehend that, for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.—Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*<sup>10</sup>

Enough of grace will be given to every diligent, earnest Christian, to enable him to work out his own salvation; but not enough to set him free from the necessity of working at all. He must still labour; and the more sedulously, the more he is assisted by spiritual influence; for God ever expects a result, proportioned to the means which he affords us. The indwelling and cooperation of the Holy Spirit are urged by

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Phil. iii. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Phil. iii. 12.

St. Paul to his converts, not as a ground for supineness and inactivity; but as a motive to fearful and trembling diligence in working out their salvation.

Look at the question too in this point of view. The Scriptures do not pretend to define, with exactness, how much virtue is required of every man; but proceed upon this general principle, that God expects every man to be as good as he can be. They do not say, Thus far must thou come, and needest not advance further; thus far must thou improve thyself, and then rest contented with thy state; but, Labour continually; *strive to enter in at the strait gate. Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.* It is the design of the Gospel, not to make men just so virtuous and pious, and no more; but to make them as virtuous and pious as possible: for that at least is implied in the command, that we shall be holy *as he that hath called us is holy.*<sup>11</sup>

Since no man can presume to say, at any moment of his Christian course, that he is as pious, as pure, as heavenly-minded as he ought to be, or as he might be; it is plain, that we are required, by our religion, to be continually

<sup>11</sup> 1 Pet. i. 15.



advancing in godliness. A divine original is proposed to us for our imitation, a perfect resemblance to which is indeed unattainable ; but he who has proposed it to us, and is ready to assist our endeavours, may with justice expect that the copy shall be as complete as it is in our power to make it.<sup>12</sup>

Let no one therefore imagine, that there is no work to be done by him in his Christian vocation, or that it has been done once and for ever. He must be continually engaged in it, and continually anxious to succeed ; and while continually rewarded by success, encouraged to press onward and upward ; to climb the ascending steps of holiness, and to attain to a nearer and brighter view of that place of light and glory to which his Redeemer beckons him, and of his own hope of entering into the fulness of its enjoyment.

What then are the questions, which I should propose to myself, as a follower of Jesus Christ, and an aspirant after evangelical perfection ? Not merely whether I am reconciled unto God by the death of his Son ; not whether I have a plenary assurance of that fact, superseding my personal exertions ; but, whether I am in an

<sup>12</sup> See the Notes.

improving state. Am I conscientiously persuaded that I am not standing still, in the race that is set before me; but that I am really a more serious, faithful, diligent Christian than I was; and earnestly endeavouring to bear a still more perfect resemblance to the pattern proposed for my imitation? In good truth, a contented acquiescence in his present state, whatever reason he may have to be thankful to God for having enabled him to advance so far, is not characteristic of a true Christian. He delights in looking back upon the dangers which he has escaped, the temptations which he has withstood, and the burthens which he has cast off: but he delights still more in looking forward to the triumphs of grace, which are still to be achieved in him, and the manifestations, by which the divine strength may be made perfect in his weakness. Every accession of grace, will make him feel more sensibly how much is needed still. The more he performs of his work, the more alive will he be to its magnitude. His is an upward path: each step, in his career of piety and virtue, enlarges the horizon of his view, and enables him to descry more distant tracts, and brighter prospects, expanding by degrees into the glories of a better state. His conscience is thus kept

in an awakened posture : he is preserved from self-satisfaction, formality, and carelessness, by a growing conviction of the difficulty of Christian perfection, and the preciousness of Gospel promises, and the unspeakable importance of *following after them, if that he may apprehend that, for which also he is apprehended of Christ Jesus.*

Let the most serious and zealous disciple of Christ consider what the Scriptures require of him in that character ; and he must perceive that he has still much to do. We are to love God with all our heart and mind ; and our neighbour as ourselves. Which of us can pretend to say, that he has attained to those degrees of piety and charity, which correspond to these commands ? Christians must forgive, freely and fully forgive, every one his brother their trespasses ; must harbour no spark of malice or ill-will ; must not revile again ; but return kindness for injury, a blessing for a curse. Who can say that he has not yet much to do ; many struggles to make against passion and temper ; many prayers to urge for the grace of meekness ; before he can form his disposition to this heavenly mould ? Is there one amongst us, who thinks so much as he ought, of the comparative

importance of soul and body, of time and eternity? Are we satisfied in our consciences, that we are engaged as earnestly and heartily as we ought to be, in working out our own salvation? Is there no trifling, no wasting nor abusing, the precious time which the Lord gives us for that work? Are none of our talents and opportunities misemployed upon frivolous pursuits, which might be turned to much better account in improving the state of our souls? Is there no Lord's day neglected, no means of grace refused or unimproved? Have we attained to such a heavenly state of mind, that we look to God in every thing that we say or do? Do we understand our peculiar temptations, and the most effectual means of resisting them? and is it our chief study and delight, as members of the great family of Christ, to do all the good we can in the world, for the honour and glory of God? Surely in some one or other of these particulars, the very best and most considerate of us all may find room for amendment, at any moment of our lives.

Let me then again earnestly impress upon you the necessity of putting to yourselves the questions, Am I in an improving state? Am I conscious of a daily progress and advancement

in piety and godliness? Have I diligently sought for the assistance of God's grace, and felt the effects of it in the increase of faith, hope, and charity? These are trying questions; and they must be answered. If your spiritual condition be not progressively better, it is absolutely worse: for every additional hour of inactivity and neglect, of talents uncultivated or misemployed, adds to the number of your sins, and places you still further from that state of grace and hope, into which you can be brought only by much perseverance and labour.

In conducting that self-examination by which these questions may be determined, we must beware of self-deceit, and self-righteousness. We must not compare ourselves with other men, nor judge of our religious character by the standard of the world's opinions or practices: but we must compare our feelings and habits, at different points of our career, and determine whether any advance has been made towards Christian perfection. And then, if we have the happiness of reflecting, that by God's grace we have been enabled to take one step forwards in the path of eternal life; if we have mastered one sin, shaken off one evil habit, acquired a livelier relish for heavenly things, and are more intimately

acquainted with the real nature of our own sinfulness, and of God's mercies in Jesus Christ; let us be thankful, but not presuming; encouraged, but not lifted up; excited to fresh diligence; not soothed into a groundless and pernicious security. Our language, in every stage of improvement, will be, *By the grace of God I am what I am:*<sup>13</sup> I have laboured more abundantly than once I did; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me; and let me continue to show that *I receive not the grace of God in vain.*<sup>14</sup>

If we be asked whether we exclude from the kingdom of heaven all who fail of attaining to the highest degree of perfection of which they are capable, we reply, Far from it; we do not presume to mark the quantity of excellence necessary for a Christian, more precisely than it is marked in Scripture: but of this we are sure; that where the Scripture commands us to aim at the highest degrees of goodness, it can never be quite safe to rest contented with any degree short of that, which is attainable to our abilities and means. And although there are many mansions in heaven, and the improver of the two talents was rewarded in proportion, as well as

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 10.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 1.

he who had five; yet both were equally diligent according to their means; and there is no promise of a reward to those who fall short of their opportunities. A man's services are *accepted according to that he hath.*<sup>15</sup>

In arguing for the necessity of a continued progress in the Christian graces and virtues, I have all along taken it for granted, that the assistance of God's Holy Spirit is to be sought for in aid of our own exertions. The certainty that it *may* be obtained, and that *without* it we can do nothing as we ought, is the greatest encouragement to a persevering endeavour at improvement; and takes away all excuse from the indolent and unprofitable Christian. We are directed to *work out our own salvation with fear and trembling*—and why? because *it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure.*<sup>16</sup>

There is one mark and token of spiritual improvement, not indeed infallible, but very encouraging; and that is, when a Christian draws near for the first time to the table of the Lord. It indicates an awakened sense of the obedience which he owes to all the commands of the Lord Jesus; and a desire to approach him more

<sup>15</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Phil. ii. 12.

nearly. As long as that mark of his faith and allegiance is wanting, we do not say that he is absolutely in an unimproving state, but we are sure that he has no reason to regard himself with complacency, nor to believe that he has yet arrived at that degree of Christian holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Finally, brethren, lay these undoubted truths to heart, and apply them to your own consciences. No man can love Christ too devotedly, nor serve God too laboriously. Not to advance in piety and virtue, is to go back. Every step we take in the path of the just, excites and enables us to make a further progress. Improvement is the testimony of the Spirit, the pledge of sanctification, the earnest of a better state. No man will say on his death-bed, To what purpose was all my care and diligence? I might have been less devout, less self-denying—why did I lead so strict a life? But many, alas too many, will say at that fearful hour; Why did I not improve my time? How much better might I have been, if I had not wasted my opportunities, and neglected the offers and means of grace, and quenched the motions of the Spirit! Brethren, what are the terms of salvation? Striving; watchfulness; soberness;



labour; diligence; fear. These are the words of God, and he will be as good as his word. *He is not mocked.* Let us not attempt to deceive him, nor act the hypocrite with our own consciences, lest finally we should have our portion with the careless, lukewarm, unprofitable servants, in that dismal place, *where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth!*

# SERMON XIV.

CHRISTIAN PURITY.

EPHES. V. 6.

*Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

THE moral duties of Christianity may be classed under two general divisions, charity, and purity. Upon these, in their most comprehensive meaning, our blessed Lord insisted, in those discourses and parables, by which he enforced, not so much any specific actions, as the principles from which all actions ought to spring: and of these he exhibited the most perfect exemplification in his own life and death. In that part of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians from which my text is taken, he first briefly sets before them the precept and the pattern of charity. *Be ye therefore*

*followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice unto God, for a sweet-smelling savour.* He then proceeds to warn them with great earnestness of dissuasion, and with a more precise enumeration, against every kind and degree of those sins, which violate the other great duty, of Christian purity; well knowing that it is generally an easier task to persuade men to practise many of the duties which are included in the precept of love, than to subdue their fleshly inclinations, and regulate their natural appetites, and control even the thoughts and emotions of their hearts. *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*

The word *covetousness*, here used by St. Paul, is supposed by some to mean, in this place,

those impure desires, which are the source and cause of sensual indulgence; and the course of the Apostle's reasoning seems to favour this interpretation. But whether we so understand it, or rather, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, as an inordinate love of riches, no difference will be made in the general purport of St. Paul's exhortation. Both descriptions of coveting are forbidden by the tenth commandment of the decalogue; both are interdicted in the most express terms by the divine author of the Gospel; both are aptly compared with idolatry, as effectually withdrawing the heart of man from his Creator, and fixing it on the creatures; and both are included, not only here, but in other scriptures, in a peremptory sentence of exclusion from *the kingdom of Christ and of God*. Covetousness, pride, and lust, are the spots with which inherited corruption has defiled the heart of man; the stain whereof the world fixes and deepens; and from these, as the law of the Gospel requires us to be freed, so it is the grace alone, which is by the Gospel, that can free us; and our being actually free,—pure, and undefiled from these great offences,—which marks us as the true professors of the Gospel, children of God, and not of the world.

It is the great object of true religion, as far as this life is concerned, to replace mankind, as nearly as possible, in the state and condition in which they first came from their Creator's hands; to restore to them that moral dominion, in which reason is predominant over passion, and the mind rules over bodily inclinations, and is not held in bondage to outward and earthly things; a change absolutely necessary to the perfection and efficacy of religion; for it is as obviously true in reason, as it is authoritatively declared in revelation, that none but *the pure in heart shall see God*.<sup>1</sup> It is the work wrought by the Spirit, upon him who is in covenant with God, to recast his soul in the likeness of its Creator; to infuse into it the desire and the capacity of re-asserting its original powers and destiny; to enable the corrupt nature to throw off the slough of its corruption, and to aspire to a resemblance of its Maker; to be *merciful as he also is merciful*;<sup>2</sup> and to *purify itself even as he is pure*.<sup>3</sup> As this is the substance, so is it the great difficulty, and therefore the sure test, of true religion. It is easy to profess, and to pray externally, to be devout and decorous; but to *spend and be spent for the brethren*; to cast out,

<sup>1</sup> Matt. v. 8. Ps. xxiv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Luke vi. 36.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John iii. 3.

with a strong hand, the evil spirits of lust, and pride, and avarice; that is the struggle, the issue of which cannot be successful without grace; and grace is given only to the sincere and anxious seeker after God. To read the Scriptures, and to analyse their meaning; to attend the Church, and to repeat its services; to listen to the preacher, and to admire his eloquence; these are demonstrations of an inclination to religion, which promise good things as far as they go: but to *mortify the members which are on the earth, fornication, uncleanness, covetousness*; <sup>4</sup> this is religion itself, and “it is a work which requires time and pains, assiduity and constancy, watchfulness and care.” <sup>5</sup>

Beware, then, of a delusive and fatal conceit, that religion, that is, the service which we are bound to render to God, and without which he will not acknowledge us for his own, consists in any kind or degree of strictness and punctuality in the outward observances of piety. Evidences, indeed, they are, and they are also indispensable means and helps, of that perfect and reasonable service which God requires all men, and enables all Christians to render to him; but *pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father*, is the perfect combination of charity and purity; it is

<sup>4</sup> Col. iii. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Burton's Sermons, Vol. I. p. 27.

*this ; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*<sup>6</sup> A miserable self-deceiver is he, who supposes that strictness and formality in the outward observances of devotion, stated contributions to works of charity, transient emotions of piety, or thoughts of seriousness, excited by a favourite preacher, will be of the least avail in the infinitely important work of salvation from the wrath to come, if, at the same time, he indulge in one unholy practice, and have any fellowship in act, conversation, or thought, with the *unfruitful works of darkness*.

I believe that in this respect, no language, which the Christian preacher can hold, is too strong ; for this self-deceit, gross and palpable as it is, is practised by thousands of those who profess to be *children of the light*. The opinions and practice of the world encourage and sanction it ; the refinements of modern society render it more secret, and therefore more subtle and dangerous ; and they render it, at the same time, a more delicate and difficult task for the preacher of Gospel holiness, to discharge his duty faithfully ; to speak to those, who transgress it, the language of honest rebuke ; and to point the general

<sup>6</sup> James i. 27.

prohibitions of the Gospel against the particular sins of the time. Yet it is a burthen laid upon our consciences, to warn you against all sinful indulgences, especially against those which the world would persuade you to believe are not sinful; to recal your conscience and reason, from the sophistry of a deceitful counsellor, to that which cannot deceive, to *the law and the testimony*. Whatever name the world may give to such practices, by whatever standard you may now fashion your opinions, or judge of your conduct, thither you must at the last recur for judgment and sentence; there is the faithful mirror, in which you must one day recognize your true likeness, and your certain fate: *all things that are reprov'd by the Gospel, are at length made manifest by the light of the Gospel.*<sup>7</sup> If for a time you can reconcile it to a sleeping, or a corrupted conscience, to be an inconsistent, worldly professor of its doctrines, you will at last discover yourself to be a guilty sinner, convicted by its testimony, and sentenced by its everlasting decree.

Why will men, who pretend to believe that Gospel, and who do, in fact, speculatively believe it to be the law of God, satisfy themselves with an interpretation of it, which common sense would

<sup>7</sup> Eph. v. 13.



forbid them to put upon the enactments of an earthly legislature? Is it not in effect professing to think, that God has said one thing and means another? Is it possible, that a believer can live in a course of impure indulgence, or of devotedness to secular objects, and yet suppose himself to be in a state of salvation; or rather, not utterly beyond the scope and reach of salvation; when he hears the plain, emphatic, unqualified declaration of an Apostle, *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God?*<sup>a</sup> Hath God thus spoken by his inspired ambassador, and shall it not come to pass? But there are few, if any, of those who now hear me, to whom I need put the question. The worst offenders of this description, the confirmed sinner, the abandoned sensualist, are not the persons who come hither, to have their consciences probed, and their hearts searched by the Word of God. Yet if there be any such, may his grace open a way for the Word to their souls, that they may hear and respond to that voice, which sometimes can penetrate into the very recesses of a sensual heart, and the charnel-house of sin; *Awake, thou that sleepest,*

<sup>a</sup> Eph. v. 5.

*and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light.*<sup>o</sup>

But there is another class of offences, which fall under the same interdict of the Spirit; not only fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, which must not, says the Apostle, *be once named amongst you, as becometh saints*; but neither *filthiness, nor foolish*, that is, indecent and impure, *talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient*; not suitable to your character of Christian saints, holy children of God. Here, my brethren, is a wide field of inquiry, in which I leave your consciences to range, for materials of thankfulness to God, or of self-condemnation and abasement; reminding you that what is not convenient to your character of saints in the Church of Christ on earth, must inevitably disqualify you for becoming saints in his kingdom of heaven.

But I would earnestly persuade you to consider the real extent of this field of conscientious inquiry, as well as the unspeakable importance of the inquiry itself. As every kind and degree of inward impurity and uncleanness is declared to be utterly inconsistent with the duties and hopes of those, who are, or ought to be *light in the Lord*; so every outward indulgence in unholy

<sup>o</sup> Eph. v. 14.

practices, every concession which prompts or facilitates indulgence, every willing approach to temptation, every invention to render less hideous the sinfulness of sin, every kind of dalliance with ungodliness, are virtually and by implication proscribed. Where the end is forbidden, and not to be approached, the avenues thereto cannot be safely nor innocently trodden. What an almost infinite variety of objects does this consideration place within the verge of Scripture prohibition! How many amusements, how many customs of society, how many writings, which the world admires and praises, how many topics of conversation! It is fearful to think of the degree, in which the strict unbending law of Christian purity is violated by the practices of modern society, and entrenched upon, even by what are called the improvements in modern manners. No inconsiderable part of those improvements consists in the disuse of plain, truth-telling phrases; in varnishing over the deformity of sin with elegant and courteous appellations; in discountenancing, and laughing to shame, the rudeness of Christian simplicity; in smoothing the approaches to actual sin; and in obliterating, or rather concealing by a conventional silence, that broad and ineffaceable line of distinction

between the darkness of sin, and the light of spiritual obedience, which never can be made too prominent and striking.

And thus it happens, that many offences against the law of holiness are not only committed in secret, but openly talked of, and discussed as topics of ordinary interest, which, if things were called by their right names, and the honour of God sincerely desired by his servants, would either be suppressed in mournful silence, or spoken of with just reprobation or contempt. Thus, what the Gospel calls adultery, the Christian world speaks of as an affair of gallantry; and terms that intrigue and gaiety, which the Word of God declares to be fornication and uncleanness. Then as to the punishment of such offenders; the world in general thinks nothing the worse of them; especially if open scandal be avoided. They are visited perhaps, by the sentence of an earthly judicature, with a pecuniary mulct; and are regarded with suspicion by a few scrupulous and serious persons; but their reception in general society is not less cordial than before; they walk boldly through the world with all the blushing honours of sin upon them; and are talked of, and perhaps admired for a while, and by and by their offence is forgotten. But what

say the Scriptures? that *no unclean person hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*<sup>10</sup> *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*<sup>11</sup> Line upon line, and sentence upon sentence has the Holy Spirit inscribed in the page of revelation, descriptive of the indignation with which all such offences are regarded, and the heavy retribution with which they will be visited, by a just and holy God. No exception is made; no qualification is admitted. The condemnation of the unclean runs through the whole texture of the Christian Scriptures, and in the concluding chapter of the sacred volume, almost the last image, which is presented to us, is that of these miserable sinners, debarred from access to the tree of life, and excluded for ever from the heavenly Jerusalem: *for without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters; and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.*<sup>12</sup>

*Let no man therefore deceive you with vain words.* Suffer not your reason and conscience to be imposed upon by the phraseology of the world, which chooses to interpret the Gospel language by its own unauthorized and deceitful glosses. Let not the tacit forbearance of society

<sup>10</sup> Eph. v. 5.<sup>11</sup> Heb. xiii. 4.<sup>12</sup> Rev. xxii. 15.

towards those, who ought to be considered its pests, induce a belief, that their offences are, under any circumstances, tolerated by the Gospel. Make not even the prohibitions of human laws, much less the opinions and fashions of men, the rule, or test of Christian holiness ; but the plain unequivocal words of that law, by which we are solemnly pledged to walk, and by which we shall assuredly be judged. The world may tolerate that, which it ought to mark with strong reprobation ; it may smile upon and receive those, whom it ought to rebuke and cast out. It may admit to its privileges and enjoyments those, who have broken the most sacred bonds of the social compact, and the laws of common humanity, and have given no indications of remorse. But let not all this deceive you ; *because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.* And it cometh upon them, in retribution of a twofold transgression of his laws ; as violating the precept of charity, no less than that of purity. To the indulgence of sensual appetites may be traced a very large proportion of the misery, and poverty, and crime, which prevail in the world. It turns aside the minds of those who practise it from all praiseworthy and beneficial pursuits ;

corrupts the source of thought and action; brutalizes the temper, and stupefies the understanding. It is necessarily the cause of sin in others, and so propagates guilt and misery. It produces disputes, and fatal contentions; creates the necessity of expense and profusion, leading, in many cases, to rapine and fraud. The ruin of innocence, and the confirmation of guilt; the destruction of character and of peace of mind; the disruption of the closest ties of nature and affection; the tears and reproaches of the injured, written in the Lord's book of remembrance; domestic anguish, and unutterable misery of heart; murder, and suicide;—these are the bitter fruits, in this world, of that conduct, which at once transgresses, in all this variety of results, the Christian precept of love; and defiles the temple of the Holy Ghost; making that, where the Spirit desires to dwell, the abode of evil passions and lusts.

If it be said, that there may be many, who, without a strict observance of the Gospel law of holiness, keep within certain limits, and are not guilty of those flagitious excesses, which have now been described; we answer, not to insist upon the fact, that no man, who once transgresses the strict line of duty in this respect, can tell to

what lengths he will insensibly proceed; that not even the least degree of criminal indulgence can be otherwise than injurious to themselves and others; to themselves, by the breach which it makes in their moral integrity, and the cloud which it interposes at once between God and their souls; to others, by the contagion of sin, and the influence of example. But even were no evil consequences at all to be discerned at the present, it is not by its immediate and sensible results that, as believers in revelation, we are to determine, of any action, whether it may or may not be done; but by the plain declarations of God's Word. Nor are we at liberty to speculate upon the comparative safety, or lawfulness, of different degrees of familiarity with practices forbidden in that Word; our rule being equally plain and uncompromising, *Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*: and in these works the Apostle enumerates, not merely the grosser acts of impurity, but also *foolish talking and jesting*; and he, who was greater than an Apostle, had before included, in the same sentence of condemnation, the sinful act, and the permitted thought of sin.

Strict as may appear to be these prohibitions of the Christian law, we may not encourage, nor



permit you to believe, that he, who has enacted and recorded them, will tolerate the slightest wilful deviation from the letter of his commands. Nor can we reasonably expect that he should; seeing that he lays upon us no burthen heavier than he either finds or will make us able to bear; and exacts no obedience, which is not practicable in the required degree. It can be no excuse whatever for the sensualist to say, I was unable to resist; it was not I that did it, but sin that dwelleth in me; when the Judge will answer, The grace of God would have been sufficient for thee, and thou knewest it, but didst not seek it. In fact, all our rebukes of uncleanness, all our exhortations to purity of heart and life, will be inoperative and fruitless, unless we can convince our hearers of their natural inability, and drive them to seek the grace of God. *He* gives to every subject of his kingdom the power of obedience; but it is not a power residing in us by nature; *the preparation of the heart is from the Lord.* That faith, which is the vital principle, both of purity and love, the foundation and the strength of obedience, *is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.*<sup>13</sup> It is his *free gift*, inasmuch as we can do nothing to deserve or

<sup>13</sup> Eph. ii. 8.

purchase it; but it is not an arbitrary gift; for the promise of his *giving liberally*, is only *to them that ask him*.<sup>14</sup> Strive, therefore, to be convinced, by the Word of God, of your natural sinfulness and want of strength; beat down, with *the sword of the Spirit*, that pride, which bars the avenues of grace. In self-abasement, and by earnest prayer, labour to obtain that powerful aid, which may control the workings of the flesh, and repress the inordinacy of the heart, and open a passage for the truths and comforts of the Gospel, breaking down the barriers which have been raised by impurity and uncharitableness, that *judgment may run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream*.<sup>15</sup> Lay to heart the purposes and requirements of the Gospel; the end of religious duties and ordinances; the intention of God in giving us so many means of grace; the inexcusableness of those who sin from want of knowledge, when they have the Word of God, and his ministers, to instruct them; or from want of resolution, when they have the promises of his Holy Spirit to strengthen them. Be no longer content,—and this, my Christian friends, is a caution which I would solemnly charge upon your consciences at the end of every discourse,—be no

<sup>14</sup> James i. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Amos v. 24.

longer content to pray in words for that grace, which you never use to the improvement of your heart and life; to hear these directions which you never attempt, nor perhaps intend to follow; to be convinced by the preacher of the importance of those duties, which you never design, or never seriously endeavour to practise.

# SERMON XV.

CONSTANCY IN OUR CHRISTIAN PROFESSION.

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1 TIM. VI. 12.

*Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

THE expression of the fight of faith, or, more properly, the contest of faith, is an allusion to the athletic games of ancient Greece; the preparation for which required much self-denial and endurance; and the prize of which was an object of competition to the noblest and the richest of her sons. With their ambition and exertions St. Paul elsewhere compares his own, and those of the Christian competitors for the rewards of eternity; who were *temperate in all things*, and brought their bodies into subjection, *to obtain not*

*a corruptible crown, but an incorruptible.*<sup>1</sup> And therefore the Apostle's exhortation in the text, *Fight the good fight of faith*, enjoins upon his young disciple the exercise of all those qualities of temperance, patience, firmness, and resolute perseverance, which, if they were necessary to ensure the mastery in a contest with flesh and blood, were still more indispensable to him, who had to *wrestle against principalities and powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; against spiritual wickedness in high places.*<sup>2</sup>

A similar allusion to the same contests of strength is again made by St. Paul, in his second Epistle to Timothy, with a like anticipation of reward; *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.* The successful competitor in the games reached forth his hand, to receive from the judge, or umpire, the crown of victory; and therefore St. Paul, after encouraging his youthful friend to fight the good, or honourable fight of faith, tells him to grasp the promised recompense, or prize; *lay hold on eternal life.* So he describes himself to the

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. vi. 12.

Philippians, as *pressing towards the mark, or goal, for the prize*; and as here it is *eternal life whereunto thou art called*, so there it is *the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*. Lastly, as in the case of a striving for those honours, which, however trivial the intrinsic value of the prize, elevated the successful competitor to the highest pitch of popular fame, the candidates were obliged to make beforehand a public declaration of their country, and parentage, and determination to enter the lists, in presence of the most august assembly of the heathen world; so the Apostle thinks fit to remind the Christian candidate for heavenly honours, that he had not only been called to a participation in them, through the appointed means; but that he had professed himself, in public and solemn manner, one of that chosen body of resolute men, who had embraced the faith, and taken up the cross of Christ, and were prepared to encounter all hardships and difficulties, in their struggle for an imperishable and unfading crown of glory.

The profession, to which the Apostle here alludes, was made by Timothy, upon his ordination to the presbytery; but his exhortation is applicable to every one who bears the name of Christian: certainly to every one who pretends to any

part or lot in those privileges, which are implied in that name; for all such have professed a good profession, before many witnesses.

In the first place, all have been baptized. That being the form of admission into his Church appointed by the Lord himself, we can hardly attribute the privileges and hopes of membership to any who refuse or neglect that sacrament. But this, it may be said, when administered to infants, cannot with truth be designated as a profession of Christianity. Now, in the first place, such a profession is made in the name, and on the behalf of the infant, by his sponsors; and unless he retract that profession, upon arriving at the age of discretion, he does virtually recognise it, and take it upon himself. He would, in fact, recognise such an implied profession, even if none had been made for him in terms by his sponsors; for, since the Gospel requires it of all who would become Christians, (and all must become Christians by baptism,) it follows, that every one who is baptized, and afterwards bears the character of a Christian, may be considered as having virtually, by his acquiescence in the relation so laid upon him, made a distinct profession of faith in Christ, and of fidelity in his

service. And though many (alas too many!) who are sprinkled with the elemental water of baptism, never attain by it *the answer of a good conscience towards God*; yet all, who receive that seal of the divine promises, and bear its outward impression, and are content to be classed amongst believers, have, in fact, witnessed a good profession, good as far as it went; and are everlastingly bound by the terms and spirit of that profession.

But according to the wise and salutary discipline of our own Chũrch, this profession, instead of being left to an inference, unobserved, perhaps, by others, and unthought of by the party who has made it, is embodied in a distinct and solemn form, with significant and edifying ceremony; agreeably not only to the obvious propriety and consistency of a system which permits infant baptism, but to the practice of the Christian Church from the very beginning. To all who have received the ordinance of Confirmation, that is, to every sincere and consistent member of the Church of England, may be addressed, with peculiar emphasis and truth, the exhortation of St. Paul to Timothy, *Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed*



*a good profession before many witnesses.* I have before observed, that whether such a distinct and public act of acknowledgment has ever taken place or not, every Christian, every nominal Christian, is supposed to have made it, and will be answerable for it, as if made. The very name by which he is called, a professor of the Gospel, implies it; and a miserable subterfuge and self-deceit would that be, if any such were found, which would seek to escape the strictness of evangelical obligation, by shunning the formal and express acknowledgment of its authority. But still, as it is a duty, of a very sacred kind, incumbent upon all Christians, to make such a public and solemn avowal of their faith and love; so, when it has been made, the ministers of religion are furnished thereby with an additional topic of encouragement, or rebuke; and forgetfulness becomes less excusable in the parties themselves, who, in the exercise of an unfettered choice, and guided by the dictates of conscience and a deliberate judgment, have professed themselves the disciples of Christ, and the children and servants of God.

To all, therefore, who have so renewed the promises made for them at their baptism, whether recently, or at any former period, I would say,

and first to the latter, Remember the profession which you once professed before many witnesses. If it were made at the time with insincerity, or careless trifling, that was a sin, of which, I trust, you have had grace to repent ; and seriously to reconsider the nature and extent of that self-dedication, which you then declared in words. But if it were sincere, made under a deep conviction of the unspeakable importance of a right belief, and a holy practice ; of your own sinfulness and weakness, and of the necessity of God's grace and mercy, and of its plenteousness towards those who are taken into covenant with him ; I would then ask, whether you have been from that day to the present, uniformly and conscientiously observant of your promises ? If not, what excuse have you to allege ? Have you, since that solemn devotion of yourselves, seen any reason to suspect that the religion in which you then declared yourselves believers, is not a true religion ? or that the alternative between life and death eternal, between salvation and damnation, is less awful and important than when it was pressed upon your tender understanding, and unhardened conscience ?

Does the Word of God speak another language now, from what it then did ? Have you

seen any cause for believing, that his hatred of sin is less intense, his justice less severe, his promises, or his threats, less certain? Or have you acquired any right to absolve yourselves from one jot or tittle of that sacred engagement, by which you then, freely and of your own accord, bound your souls for ever? or to loosen a single band of that strictness, by which the Gospel law obliges the consciences and thoughts of men? No: I am persuaded that there is no man so blinded by the deceivableness of sin, as to venture an affirmative answer to these questions. What then? Are the promises in themselves of that nature that they may safely be violated or neglected? Is the alternative, which depends upon them, of too trivial a kind to occasion much anxiety? No: for the promises are made to God, who has commanded us by his Spirit, *promise unto the Lord thy God, and keep it*; to him, who, as his own *promises are yea and amen*, expects that his children and servants will abide by their engagements, and not *start aside like a broken bow*, at the very first trial of their faithfulness. Then as to the alternative which depends upon that faithfulness, what is it? the question whether we belong to Christ or not; whether we are the destined inheritors of his kingdom,

or are reserved for chains and outer darkness. Again, then, we ask, what excuse have *you* to urge, who have forgotten or transgressed your baptismal engagement, solemnly renewed in confirmation?

You will, I foresee, be prepared to urge two. The first, that you have been, of necessity, too much occupied in the business of the world, to think so much or so seriously as you could have wished, and as, indeed, you acknowledge that you ought to have done, about the engagement which you contracted in early life with your Creator and Redeemer. Of necessity? What necessity does a Christian acknowledge in such a matter? As if any necessity could be so great as that of saving your souls alive! According to the common acceptance of the term, where no physical constraint is used, advantage is usually the measure of necessity; that is most necessary to be done, which is most profitable to be done; and if so, we close the argument at once with our Saviour's unanswerable question, *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* O that his Spirit might bring that question home to the hearts and consciences of many thousand self-deluding sinners, who toil, and labour, and contrive, and suffer

pain, and hunger, and thirst, and care, to secure to themselves the good things, as they are called, of this world, riches, and honours, and advantages, far beyond the limit of natural requirement and Christian moderation; and satisfy, or rather deceive their consciences, under the breach of their promises to God, with that convenient word, Necessity. Would such a plea be admitted, as a valid excuse for breaking a solemn compact with our neighbour? To a free moral agent, accountable for his actions, but one thing is strictly needful or necessary, and that is, to approve himself to God. If the soul be of greater value than the body; if the interests of time be less important than those of eternity; if heaven be more desirable than hell; if to reign for ever in the one, be better than everlasting burnings in the other; then must the performance of our promises to God be more necessary than any thing in the world besides.

The second excuse, which the promise-breaker will be ready to make, is this: I am alive to the importance of keeping my word with God; but, alas! I want the ability. I cannot do the things that I would. *I see a law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing*

*me into captivity to the law of sin.*<sup>a</sup> But can you read the Scriptures, and yet offer such an excuse? Remember, that the very ground, on which you professed your determination to observe the promises which had been made for you, was this, that the grace of God would enable you so to do. And while you were instructed by the Church, in your earliest years, that “you were not able to do good things of yourselves, nor to walk in the commandments of God, and to serve him, without his special grace,” you were taught to seek for that grace at all times, by diligent prayer; and at your confirmation you were reminded of the necessity of being strengthened with the Holy Ghost the Comforter; of daily growing in grace; and of depending upon the Lord for supplies of spiritual health. Natural weakness and corruption may be urged, in palliation of those lapses to which fallen man remains subject, even under the Gospel covenant; but they are no excuses for not *attempting* to keep our promises, nor for neglecting to seek for that strength which we complain of wanting.

Look well, therefore, to the terms of your engagement; and be assured that God will exact from you the performance of them, even to the

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vii. 23.

letter ; making allowance only for those defects, which shall be truly and literally not only unintentional, but unavoidable.

With such considerations I would strive to awaken the slumbering consciences of those, who have long forgotten, practically at least forgotten, that there was a day, and an hour, when they came before the Lord, and professed a solemn profession of their allegiance, and of their devotion to his service ; a pledge, which they are not at liberty to retract ; but must remain for ever bound by its obligation ; for the covenant, which they have made with the Lord, is a perpetual covenant, unchangeable in its requirements ; not to be modified or neutralized in its provisions, to suit the maxims and views of worldly wisdom, or convenience ; but, like its great Mediator, *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.*

Whatever arguments may be urged, on the score of a consistent regard to a promise and profession once made to the Lord, apply with peculiar force to those, who have recently bound themselves to his service. *They* have not yet had time enough to forget that solemn act, by which they laid upon themselves an engagement of everlasting interest. The instruction, by which

they were prepared for that good profession ; the tenor of those prayers, in which they were recommended to the Holy Spirit of God ; the words of exhortation, which they heard from the chief pastor of the Church, are yet fresh in their recollection. May they have grace to cherish the remembrance of them ; to live under a continued and unfading impression of the day, on which they bound their souls with a bond, and ratified the terms of their separation from a sinful world. Let them meditate upon the Apostle's exhortation to Timothy, which points out to them, in few but expressive words, their duty, their danger, and their reward.

*Fight the good fight of faith.* A good fight, indeed, but a hard one, against the enemies of Christ, and of man's salvation, who will endeavour to shake your faith by sophistry, and cavil, and ridicule ; to vitiate it by the conceits of human reason ; to obliterate it by worldly pleasure ; or to stifle it by worldly care. Nevertheless, fight the good fight : and if you observe the discipline of the Christian soldier, we promise you success. *Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*<sup>4</sup>—*Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able*

<sup>4</sup> Eph. vi. 10.



*to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.*

*Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called.* The expression denotes a vigorous and resolute effort. It is not said, Wait patiently, till an assurance of eternal life be given thee, without thy seeking; but *lay hold* on it. It is near thee, in the Gospel: stretch forth thy hand and grasp it firmly. Like the great Apostle himself, *reach forth unto those things which are before, and press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* You cannot say, that there is no encouragement, no promise of your obtaining that which you seek to make your own. True, the prize is an inestimable prize; infinitely above your claims and deservings, whatever be your diligence and faithfulness; and well may we wonder at the unsearchable mercy of God, in proposing such a reward to competitors so unworthy of it. Nevertheless, he does propose it; and not only proposes it, but invites you to strive for it, with a promise of success. Observe, it is *eternal* life whereunto thou art *called*. What excuse, then, can there be for apathy and indifference, when the object of pursuit is one of infinite and everlasting value; or for the inactivity of fear, when

the Lord himself has said, *Seek, and ye shall find?*

But remember, that although you are called to eternal life by Christ himself in his Gospel, which call implies a promise of success to those who comply with it in spirit and in truth; yet there is an outward and formal calling, and there is an effectual calling; and as the former is the pledge, so the latter is the substance of success. Avail yourselves of the former, to make the latter your own. It is not enough to have a distinct perception of your Christian calling, a clear conviction of the truth, that God willeth all men to be saved, and that you, amongst others, have received from him a message of reconciliation; unless your hearts are proportionably affected. There must be not only a hearing of the call, but a seeking for the spirit of it; an anxious inquiry into all its intendments and bearings; an earnest desire to have the Word made lively and heart-possessing; in short, that spiritual and humble diligence, by which the Apostle tells us we may make our calling and election sure.

You must be elected, or chosen, as well as called; and in order to ascertain whether you have been chosen of Christ, see whether you have chosen *him*. You have professed to do

so, and before many witnesses. The question has been put to you in his name, *Choose you this day whom you will serve* ;<sup>5</sup> and you have answered, with clearer views of the alternative, and still more constraining motives than the children of Israel had, when they said to Joshua, *The Lord our God will we serve ; and his voice will we obey*. Enquire whether you have chosen Christ, not only with the assent of your reason, but with the election of your heart ; not only as your master and judge, but as your Saviour and friend. Think of him, and love him for what he has done, and suffered for you ; and seek that he may *dwell in your hearts by faith* ; that ye, who are yet but young and tender plants, may by degrees be *rooted and grounded in love* ; that you may be intelligent and enlightened, for then you will be faithful and diligent Christians ; being able to comprehend, with all saints, the wonderful dimensions of the love of Christ. And as a motive to undertake the work with seriousness of purpose, let me remind you, that all your advantages of education, and religious instruction, all the ordinances and means of grace, every chapter which you read in your Bible, every sermon which you hear, must be accounted for, and

<sup>5</sup> Josh. xxiv. 15.

yourselves judged according to the use which you have made of them; *for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.*<sup>6</sup>

And now, perhaps, it may be said by some who hear me, All this reasoning applies with great cogency to the case of those, who have made a distinct and solemn profession of Christ, and have laid upon their consciences the obligation of a sacred promise and contract. They, indeed, will stand self-convicted and condemned, without excuse, and undeserving of pity, if they forget that indefeasible engagement. But *we* are not concerned in the argument. We have made no such profession and promise; we are bound by no engagement in terms, to do what they have pledged themselves to do; and therefore, whatever motives and reasons may be advanced on other grounds, to persuade us to a compliance with the law of Christ, you cannot urge us with the plea of consistency, as having *professed a good profession before many witnesses.*

Now, in the first place, if it be really true that you have indeed never confessed Christ before men, neither will he confess you before his Father which is in heaven; and therefore, as we are reasoning all along upon the supposition that

<sup>6</sup> Luke xii. 48.

you desire to be saved through Christ, the argument is closed at once. But, in point of fact, all of you have made a profession of Christianity, and have repeated it again and again. If you avail yourselves of the outward privileges which a Christian Church affords ; if you join in its ordinances ; if you take part in its forms of devotion ; if you listen day by day to its ministers, and appear in the character of its members ; you do, in effect, and to the common apprehension of mankind, make an open profession of discipleship ; you do virtually declare your acceptance of the Gospel covenant, your acquiescence in its terms, your determination to abide by its conditions. All, therefore, may be entreated, on the ground of consistency and sincerity, to walk after their calling and profession ; or be admonished that they must expect their lot and portion with the hypocrites, who *profess that they know God, but in works deny him* ;<sup>7</sup> who come to Christ with all the forms of godliness, and cry, Lord, Lord, but want the spirit and principle within ; and do not the works which he has commanded.

How much, and how seriously ought every Christian to reflect upon his *profession* ; upon

<sup>7</sup> Tit. i. 16.

all that is implied in that term; a deliberate choosing of Christ; a voluntary but irrevocable engagement in the service of God; an unhesitating reliance upon his promises; a continual seeking after his grace; a holy and upright walk towards heaven! How divine a thing, when thus understood and exemplified! But if it be *only* a profession, in the common meaning of the word; a mere verbal declaration, acknowledgment, and promise, how dreadful and dangerous a thing! for it involves in itself the qualities and consequences of hypocrisy, and falsehood, and double dealing with God. *He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*<sup>a</sup> My brethren in the Lord, some profession or other we have all made. Its consequences, be they good, or be they evil, we cannot avoid. How many are there, with whom it is nothing more than a formal and lifeless profession! How many are there, with whom even the outward semblance of it has been laid aside! Let those who still remember it, and bear about them its external marks, beware of resting in its lowest degrees; of cleaving to their sins, and speaking peace to themselves,

<sup>a</sup> 1 John. ii. 4.

while they are still under the curse. Let them add the spirit and the substance to the form and shadow; the spirit of sincerity, of humility, of diligence; the spirit of prayer and supplication; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength; the spirit of knowledge, of holiness, and of hope!

## SERMON XVI.

THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF SIGNAL  
CALAMITIES.



LUKE XIII. 4.<sup>1</sup>

*Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

THE law, which was given by Moses to the Israelites, under the inspiration of their Almighty king and legislator, was throughout typical of better things to come: and as its purpose was, in some sense, temporary, so the rewards which it proposed, and the punishments which it denounced, were principally, if not altogether,

<sup>1</sup> This sermon was preached on the 2d of March, 1828, two days after the destruction of the Brunswick Theatre; a catastrophe which was described, in handbills dispersed through the metropolis, as a signal manifestation of God's anger against theatrical amusements. The text is contained in the Lesson for the day.



temporal. Worldly prosperity was promised to legal obedience, and personal calamity and woe were the stated penalties of legal transgression, to be inflicted by the instruments of an offended Deity, the drought, the famine, the pestilence, and the sword. The blessing and the curse, which were set before that stiff-necked people, which were pronounced with so much solemnity upon the mounts of Ebal and Gerizim,<sup>2</sup> were, as far as their purport was then developed, a blessing and a curse of temporal good and evil. The opinion, which naturally resulted from this peculiarity of the law, had so interwoven itself into the national belief, and so tintured the popular phraseology of the Jews, that even our blessed Saviour did not hesitate to adopt and employ it, when he was endeavouring to lead his countrymen to more spiritual apprehensions of the counsels and providence of God : *Blessed are the meek ; for they shall inherit the earth.*

The Jew, who remembered the plagues denounced against transgression, and those fearful displays of God's vengeance against impenitent sinners, which were recorded in Scripture, naturally considered disease, and signal calamity, and sudden death, to be the appointed punishments

<sup>2</sup> Josh. viii. 33.

of sin : a notion, which was true in an extended sense ; but false, or uncertain, when applied to individual cases. When the disciples of Jesus saw a man who had been blind from his birth, they inquired of their master, *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind ?*<sup>3</sup> So, when certain of the Jews told our Lord of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, they probably insinuated, that the calamitous fate of those unhappy men was no more than the just reward of their misconduct. A similar connexion seems to have been discovered, by some censorious or misjudging disciples, between the sudden destruction of the persons, on whom the tower in Siloam had fallen, and their sins ; for our Saviour includes both incidents in that memorable rebuke and warning, which contains the true principle of improving the calamities of others to the glory of God, and our own spiritual good. *Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? I tell you, Nay : but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them ; think ye that they were sinners above all*

<sup>3</sup> John ix. 2.

*men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

There is nothing more certain, than that the same Almighty Power, which made the world, still continues to uphold and govern it; that the system of the universe, both physical and moral, not only in its grander and more striking features, but in all its intricate complications, and minute details, is under the control and guidance of his Providence; that without him not even a sparrow falleth to the ground.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, we instinctively believe, and are irresistibly compelled to act upon a belief, that many events are contingent upon our own actions; and that many are the effects of chance. To reconcile these seemingly opposite conclusions, is one of those difficult problems, to the complete solution of which human reason is incompetent; and its incompetency, in this respect, arises from the difference, a difference of unknown degrees and dimensions, between the nature and attributes of God, and those of his reasonable creatures. We know, of a certainty, that *his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out*; and they are so, because, *as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways higher*

<sup>4</sup> Matt. x. 29.

*than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts.*<sup>5</sup>

In contemplating the divine excellencies, as objects of adoration, love, and holy fear, we ought to fix our attention chiefly upon the former of these truths, and consider every thing which happens, as happening under the direction of his Providence: but in considering his moral government of the world, as more immediately connected with our practical duties, we are to regard many of the events of this life as contingencies, in some degree depending upon the voluntary exercise of those gifts and faculties with which he has endowed us. Our natural constitution renders it impossible for us not to do so; and God deals with us in his Word as though it were so.

We shall act most piously and modestly with respect to him, and most prudently and profitably for our own security and comfort, if we accustom ourselves to consider, beforehand, those contingencies, in which we have an interest, as determinable by our own conduct, not as entirely independent agents, but as permitted, in dependence upon the goodness of God, and in subjection to his will, to exercise

<sup>5</sup> Is. lv. 9.

our faculties in their accomplishment ; while we ascribe events, which have actually happened, to the *direction* of God's providence, where we can discern their good effects ; to his *permission*, where the evil appears to us to predominate. And thus, consistently with his omniscience, and almighty power, and our own responsibility, as free moral agents, we may reconcile those two positions, which religion alone can enable us to reconcile, *The lot is cast into the lap ; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.*<sup>6</sup>

This view of the subject, a very brief and summary view of a difficult and perplexing subject, will suggest rules of modesty and charity, to shape our judgment of the calamities which befall other men, as connected with their conduct. Many of the evils, incident to man, are so plainly and immediately derivable from his sins, that there is no presumption, nor uncharitableness, in speaking of them, as cause and effect. God has manifestly intended them to be so considered ; and it argues want of piety and wisdom, rather than of humility and kindness, not to read the lesson, which the finger of the supreme legislator has traced on the surface of human life. The diseases, which embitter the declining years

<sup>6</sup> Prov. xvi. 33.

of the intemperate, or the profligate ; the ruin consequent upon convicted dishonesty ; the poverty of the spendthrift ; these are some of the present and conspicuous symptoms of God's providential government, which it is our duty to notice, and to profit by. Again, when we see men suffering under calamities, which, humanly speaking, were the natural or probable consequences of their own rash or inconsiderate measures ; we can neither forbear from imputing their sufferings to their folly, nor, if we are wise, from benefiting by their example. But then these are the unquestionable results of those general laws, which God has established for the government of the world ; and which are known to be so established ; results, upon which we can speculate beforehand, with the same kind of confidence, (although less in degree,) as that with which we foretell that the sun will rise to-morrow, because he has risen every day since the creation of the world.

In these instances we do not pry into the secrets of God's providence, nor pretend to determine his motives in ordaining or permitting any particular event. We have learned, from a collation of numberless instances, that from a certain line of conduct, certain results may be expected to follow ; we know, that whatever

connexion subsists between the two, is of his providential appointment; and therefore, when in a fresh instance we see the same conduct followed by the same results, we are justified in saying, that the one is an appointed consequence of the other.

But we have no right to draw the same conclusion, where we have not the same grounds of induction. For instance, now that the Almighty Ruler of the world no longer exercises an immediate sovereignty over a particular people, by special displays of his power, we should not be justified in concluding with certainty, that the earthquake, which destroys a city, is a punishment specially inflicted upon its inhabitants for their sins, how righteously soever they may have deserved it, or however awful and impressive the lesson which it is calculated to teach. Whatever is signal, or unusual, is, by the very definition, not sufficiently within the scope of our daily experience, to furnish the materials of safe induction. If we cannot say, with moral certainty, that it is *generally* the appointed consequence of such and such premises, we cannot be sure that it *ever* is. And if once we take upon ourselves to pronounce, of this or that event, that it is a *special* display of God's providence, upon

no other grounds, than that we think the propriety and expediency of such a display may be justified, we entrench upon that part of the divine prerogative which the Lord hath reserved to himself. *Clouds and darkness are round about him, although righteousness and judgment are the establishment of his throne.*<sup>7</sup>

You will, no doubt, have anticipated the application which I am about to make of these principles. A catastrophe of the most appalling kind, almost in our immediate neighbourhood, has involved in sudden destruction an unknown number of human beings; and has plunged a far greater number of survivors into wretchedness and desolation of the most pitiable kind. One moment, and all was life and cheerfulness; no sounds were heard but the note of preparation for pleasure. Another passed—one fearful crash, and all was horror, and confusion, and death. It happened that the unfortunate sufferers were of an occupation, the lawfulness of which many Christians call in question. The building, which buried them in its ruins, had been recently dedicated to the purposes, some will say of sinful, others of vain and unprofitable amusement. In its preliminary details they were engaged, when

<sup>7</sup> Psalm lxxxix. 14.



the blow fell upon them which swept them into eternity. And it has happened, as was to be expected, that persons have been found, whose limited, but presumptuous views of God's dealings with mankind, have chilled those warmer sympathies of the heart, which so dreadful an event is calculated to excite; and they have spoken of it, as the just judgment of God upon the instruments and abettors of sin. *Yea, they say, the congregation of hypocrites shall be desolate; and fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery.*<sup>a</sup> Such reflexions are unbecoming the disciples of that Master, who said, *Judge not, that ye be not judged;* and surely come under the ban of that rebuke, which he uttered once and for ever against the uncharitable interpreters of God's righteous decrees; *Think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

To acknowledge the working of an all-wise and merciful Providence in every thing which happens, is indeed the delight, as it is the duty, of the truly religious man: but to pretend to read a judicial sentence of approval or condemnation, in every prosperous or adverse dispensation

<sup>a</sup> Job xv. 34.

which befalls those around us, is the part of a bold and uncharitable fanaticism, which rushes in where angels fear to tread, ascends the everlasting seat of judgment, and presumes to invest the *anathema maranatha* of human prejudice and passion with the authority of a divine decree.

Respecting the lawfulness, or unlawfulness of theatrical amusements, in a religious point of view, I am not about to deliver an opinion. Were I asked whether I think them conducive to the ends of piety and morality, I should know what to answer; although to questions, which relate to actions not expressly permitted or forbidden in the Word of God, it is no easy matter so to answer as to satisfy inquirers, who will think us needlessly and unreasonably rigid, if we answer one way; and pretend that we approve of all their excesses and abuse of recreation, if we answer the other way. But one thing I may and will say; that the pursuit of pleasure is a crying sin of the age in which we live; that Christian seriousness and self-denial must be far more commonly and consistently practised than they are, before there will be any reason to fear the ill effects, which may be expected to result from the general prevalence of an affected austerity; that we can much better spare some

of the most fashionable amusements of the day, than we can dispense with a single help to piety and devotion, a single restraint upon immorality.

But even were we to concede, that the amusements, to which I have alluded, are in themselves sinful and offensive to God, I still contend, that we are acting uncharitably and unwarrantably, if we presume to speak of this dreadful event, as a manifestation of the divine displeasure. Let him, who ventures to pronounce such a sentence, consider the inconsistencies in which he will involve himself. What will he say of the volcano, or the earthquake, or the inundation, which destroy, with unsparing and indiscriminate fury, not only the theatre and its votaries, but the church, the hospital, and the school? But, in fact, every sudden calamity, which befalls a pious individual, is a practical refutation of such uncharitable censures; still more the wide-wasting pestilence, the sudden shipwreck, the undistinguishing massacre. As, in the ordinary movements of God's providence, the rain of his bounty descends upon the just and the unjust, so the evils of this imperfect and temporary system are permitted to fall alike, though not with the same final results, upon the children and the enemies of the Most High. Away, then, with that short-sighted and mistaken

piety, which demands, with the false friends of Job, *Who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?\**

What, then, is no improvement to be made, by the religious man, of such a fearful catastrophe? Is no warning to be taken by the ungodly? Is no lesson to be impressed upon the careless, by the preacher of God's Word? Yes, surely; a lesson both of gratitude and awe: of gratitude, in the reflexion, that we, who like them that have perished, are sinners before God, and perhaps greater sinners than they were, are yet spared, to consider, and repent, and turn to the Lord; of awe, in the apprehension, that even now we may have passed by our last opportunity, and that the next day or hour may be too late. *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

While guarding against a presumptuous interpretation of those sudden and awful calamities, which stand forth in fearful prominence from the ordinary course of events, I would not persuade you to pass them by without notice; nor to stop your ears to the voice of solemn warning. Lo, *God hath spoken in his holiness.* He speaks, to the attentive ear of his pious children, in all the incidents of life; in all the phenomena of the

\* Job iv. 7.

natural, and the moral world. He speaks to them, in the sunlight and the gentle breeze ; in the glare of the lightning and the raging of the hurricane ; in the greenness of the field and forest ; in the nakedness of the rock and the howling desert ; in the murmuring of the rivulet, and the majestic tumult of the troubled ocean. In all these, and in ten thousand audible voices he speaks ; and there is not an hour in the day, nor a spot in the universe, wherein the ears of his servants fail to hear him. But sometimes he speaks, as he has now spoken, with an appalling loudness ; and the sinner and the careless one are startled at that unwonted sound, and for a moment say, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.*

Supposing, what I trust may not have been the case, that any of those ill-fated persons, who have suddenly perished, were unconverted, unrepentant sinners, there is no man, that believes in the being of a God, who would not shudder at the thought. Let every man, therefore, who is not fully satisfied of his own fitness to appear, at this moment, in the presence of his eternal Judge, make the case his own. O, but it is in the last degree improbable, you will say, that I should come to such a calamitous end.

Such dreadful events are of very rare occurrence.—But what imports it, whether the *circumstances* of your death be of the same appalling kind or not? Your death itself is certain; it may perhaps be sudden; in all probability it will be unexpected; the blow is struck, and then, in what respect will your condition be better than that of the sufferers whom you now pity, if your peace be not made with God? *Unless ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*; that is, under circumstances of equal danger to your souls; not under Siloam's tower, but under the heavy hand of God; which, if now it strikes to the right and left, and permits you to be a spectator of its inflictions, waits perhaps only until another day, or another hour of unrepented sin, shall fill up that measure of time which is appointed for the going forth of the sentence, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

The suddenness of that destruction, which cometh upon a man unawares, fearfully aggravates its horror, if he is unprepared to meet it. The gradual withdrawing, first from the pleasures, then from the cares of life; the silence, and meditation, and devotion of the sick man's chamber; the farewell looks of mournful friends; all these conspire to smooth his downward

passage to the grave, while they constrain him to set his house in order; and at last the summons comes, as the whisper of a gentle friend, who calls him to his home. *Happy is that servant, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.* But how many are surprised by the sudden stroke of death, in the midst of engagements and pursuits which have no reference to eternity; but which too commonly are likely to unfit them for eternity; pursuits which, if these wretched sinners were quite certain that their last hour was at hand, they would lay aside with all readiness, nay, with eager precipitation, lest the Lord should find them so employed, unrepentant, unreconciled, unsanctified; and assign them their portion with the hypocrites.

So it was in the days of Noah. Men wanted not a preacher of righteousness, nor a knowledge of God's will. They encouraged one another to go on; and paid more regard to mutual example than to inspired warnings; *they ate, they drank, they planted, they builded, they bought and sold, they married, they were given in marriage: and knew not, till the flood came, and took them all away.*<sup>10</sup> And so, undoubtedly, it is now, with by far the greater portion of those who bear the

<sup>10</sup> Luke xvii. 27.

Christian name. Their life is a continued alternation of worldly business and worldly pleasure ; commencing from the close of the Lord's day, and pursued up to its returning dawn. The whole business of religion is crowded into a few hours ; and by a fearful number of persons altogether neglected and forgotten. And if the hand of death were to fall upon them at any moment, except those which are given to the forms of devotion, would there be a thought of God and of Christ in their souls, at the instant of their passage into the eternal world ?

Such awful events as that, which has called forth these reflexions, like the stone falling into the stagnant pool, disturb the unhealthy calm which mantles over the surface of society ; awaken the sleeping consciences of careless sinners ; and ought to prepare them for receiving the salubrious influences of the Holy Spirit of God. *And the same hour there was a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell : and in the earthquake were slain of men, seven thousand : and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.*<sup>11</sup> But a more constraining motive than that of fear, ought to be gratitude. Thousands fall beside us, and ten

<sup>11</sup> Rev. xi. 13. .



thousand at our right hand, and yet we are spared. Who, as the Apostle asks, hath made us to differ? Not our own superior merit; but the free mercy of God. O let us not overlook nor abuse it. Let us not *despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering*, but rather know, that the goodness of God leadeth us to repentance; *lest, after our hardness and impenitent hearts, we treasure up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*<sup>12</sup> To you, who have learned, in the school of Christian wisdom, how to improve his wonderful providences, his awful warnings, and his countless mercies, all things, however unaccountable or alarming, are working together for your good: *Life or death, things present or things to come, all are yours; and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Rom. ii. 4.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.

# SERMON XVII.

PENANCE AND PENITENCE.

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PSALM LI. 17.<sup>1</sup>

*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken  
and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

How affecting must have been the spectacle, when, in the earlier ages of the Christian Church, at the commencement of the solemn fast of Lent, bands of penitents, clad in sackcloth, barefooted, and with downcast eyes, in the presence of God's ministers, confessed their sins, and in token of their humiliation, covered their heads with ashes; and were put to open penance in this world, that their souls, being awakened and humbled, might be converted and saved, through faith, in the day of the Lord. The spectacle, I say, must

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Ash-Wednesday, 1825.

have been affecting ; and, as long as there was reason to believe that the penitence was as sincere as the penance was open, and that the clergy, who imposed it, were more solicitous for the amendment of their erring brethren than for their own authority and power ; so long was it an edifying and profitable ceremony. But it is plain that this could not long continue to be the case ; scarcely, indeed, after the very first age of the Church ; for even so early had the purity of both the Christian doctrine and discipline been corrupted, and godly ordinances and institutions perverted by ungodly men.

When, therefore, our own Church expresses a pious wish, that such discipline may be restored again, we must understand it to be a wish, that the Christian community itself may be restored, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to such a state of sincerity and integrity, that the practice in question might be revived, to the promotion of true repentance and piety. At present, I am afraid, there is far too little seriousness in the world, to make such a revival desirable. Indeed, all such institutions are very liable to be so abused, as to produce effects, the very opposite to those ends which they were at first intended to answer. The Christian religion is

spiritual, a religion of the heart and affections ; and it sanctions and requires outward and visible ordinances, only as they are the means of grace, or helps to edification. Our blessed Lord himself appointed only two ; and of those, which the piety of the early believers added, for the ends of decency, and order, and instruction, some were soon abused to the purposes of hypocrisy and superstition. That, for instance, of public penance, in itself a proper exercise and expression of humility, and an appropriate token of sorrow for sin, came by degrees to be regarded as a meritorious act. The outward form was substituted for the inward grace ; bodily humiliation for spiritual contrition ; the garments were rent, but the heart was untouched.

In fact, it is so much easier a task to practise any degree of bodily mortification, than it is to subdue our natural pride, and to control our passions, that we are at all times too apt to overrate the value and importance of outward acts of penitence and piety, and to overlook the great end to which they are only subsidiary. Oral confession of sins, and bodily mortification, and outward acts of humiliation, do not constitute repentance. External discipline may so far have a good effect, as it tends to rectify what is

wrong, and to reduce the irregularities of natural passion; but is so far from being repentance, that although it is sometimes a help, it is oftentimes a hindrance, and at all times an uncertain sign.

Our blessed Saviour, who knew what was in man, cautioned his disciples against an error, into which the ceremonial nature of the law of Moses was too likely to lead them; *When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance; for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast*: a caution, signally neglected and set at nought by the Romish Church, which erected the salutary discipline of penance into a necessary sacrament, and made the outward act of humiliation and confession to be, not only a mark of repentance, but a means of procuring the remission of sins. Where so great an importance is attached to the outward act, the inward affection of the heart is apt to be but little thought of; and thus, instead of assisting the process of conversion and amendment, this branch of discipline has too often effectually impeded it, made men hypocrites, confirmed them in sin, and brought the genuine grace of repentance into disrepute.

One unfortunate consequence of this, and

similar errors of the Romish Church, is, that amongst many of those who have purified themselves from her corruptions, the outward ordinances of religion have been unduly depreciated, and religion has been stripped, not only of the useless and burthensome ceremonies, by which the real beauty and simplicity of holiness had been overlaid, but of her decent and edifying rites. On this point the language, which is held by our own Church, is no less remarkable for its moderation than its wisdom; "Of such ceremonies as be used in the Church, and have had their beginning by the institution of man, some at the first were of godly intent and purpose devised, and yet at length turned to vanity and superstition. Some entered into the Church by indiscreet devotion, and such zeal as was without knowledge; and for because they were winked at in the beginning, they grew daily to more and more abuses, which, not only for their unprofitableness, but also because they have much blinded the people, and obscured the glory of God, are worthy to be cut away and clean rejected. Other there be, which, although they have been devised by man, yet it is thought good to reserve them still, as well for a decent order in the Church, as because they pertain to

edification, whereunto all things done in the Church, as the Apostle teacheth, ought to be referred. Christ's Gospel is not a ceremonial law; but is a religion to serve God, not in bondage of the figure or shadow, but in the freedom of the Spirit; being content only with those ceremonies which do serve to a decent order and godly discipline, and such as be apt to stir up the dull mind to the remembrance of his duty to God, by some notable and special signification, whereby he might be edified."<sup>2</sup>

To apply these observations to the present occasion; if the Christian religion be spiritual in all its requirements and its promises; if great caution be necessary, in setting a value upon outward observances, lest by degrees they should be considered the one thing needful; the Church has perhaps done wisely, in laying aside that outward discipline which was formerly exercised upon penitent sinners, and which, in proportion to its strictness, was likely to be regarded as a commutation for sin. But there can be no doubt as to the propriety, not only of appointing a public and general confession of sins in the daily service of the sanctuary; but of setting apart a certain season of the year, for the more

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the Book of Common Prayer.

solemn and particular acknowledgment of our unworthiness, in such a manner as may awaken us to serious thoughts, admonish us to repentance, and lead us to seek forgiveness; without encouraging superstition, or a vain opinion of the value of our outward services.

A more important, or more awful act of religious duty there can hardly be, than that for which we are met together this day; to make a solemn, a united, and I trust a sincere confession of our sins to him, from whom nothing is hidden. It is true, that we do this in the service of every Lord's day: we ought to do it every day of our lives; for not one passes over our heads, which does not bring with it fresh occasions for repentance and confession: but it is more especially the business of this day and season; and happy will it be for us all, if the observance of this day and season shall answer the purposes of admonition, and induce us to turn our thoughts inward, and to institute a more particular and scrupulous examination of our proceedings. If it does not, we must be strangely dead to all religious impressions. We must have very inadequate and erroneous notions of our own state, if we can listen to that most solemn warning, which has just been



pronounced, without some compunctious visitings, some painful recollections of the past, and some fearful apprehensions of the future. I hope there is not one amongst us, who can hear the repeated and accumulated denunciations of God's wrath upon impenitent sinners, which are taken from the mouths of the prophets and apostles, and of the Lord Jesus, the judge of men, and yet imagine that he himself is not concerned in them.

It is as an awakening warning to ourselves, and not in condemnation of our neighbour, that we are called upon to express our belief in the truth of those sentences of Scripture, which declare that the breakers of God's law are subject to his curse: a part of the service of this day greatly misunderstood. We do not invoke, nor even pronounce a curse upon any individual sinner whatever. We are forbidden to pray for, or even to desire the infliction of that wrath upon the ungodly, which the best of us all too well deserves. But we make, on the authority and in the words of Scripture, a solemn declaration of the inevitable consequence of unrepented sin. We declare those to be accursed, or condemned before God, and excluded from the fellowship of the saints, whom God himself has declared to be accursed; and the people

assent, as they cannot but assent, to the truth of that declaration, and say, Amen, so indeed it is ! But while in this solemn act there is no breach of Christian charity towards others, there is abundant matter for serious reflexion with ourselves, lest, if we should be called to our account at no distant period, it might be said to us, *Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, O thou wicked servant.* Yet in truth and justice, this may be said to every man, who professes to believe the Word of God ; for he believes it with all its promises and threats ; and every time that he listens to the Word, or the ministers of God, declaring his just indignation against sinners, his conscience rises in judgment ; assents to and adopts the divine decree ; and anticipates the fearful sentence of the eternal judge.

The scope and purport of the public services of the Church, at this season of the year, is to excite the apprehensions of her sinful members, (and which of us comes not under that denomination ?) and to expostulate with them, in the name of her divine founder ; *Cast away from you all your transgressions whereby ye have transgressed ; and make you a new heart and a new spirit : for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Ezek. xviii. 31.

Without repentance there is no remission of sins. No doctrine is more plainly laid down in Holy Scripture than this ; and not a word more need be said in proof of its importance. There is no man that sins not ; consequently, there is no man that needs not repentance. We must all repent, therefore, or we cannot be saved. Can any propositions be clearer than these ? And can any reasonable being, who knows that he has a soul to be saved, suffer a single day to pass over his head, without reverting to this awful truth ? We fear there are many ; many, who, for days, and weeks, and years together, never regard themselves as sinners ; never think of the polluted state of their souls ; never tremble at the prospect of judgment ; nor at the thoughts of that extreme malediction, which will then light upon them that shall be set on the left hand of the judge. This carelessness it is, which renders our exhortations to repentance always seasonable ; it is a topic never out of place ; it is acknowledged not to be so, when men come to die ; and why it should be so at any period of our lives, it would be difficult to say, unless we are prepared to contend, what I am sure none of us are, that a single day of our existence passes into the years that are gone, unsullied by

one transgression. Repentance was the harbinger of redemption. It stood in the forefront of the Gospel; it was inscribed on the standard of the great prophet, who made a highway through the desert for the Lamb of God. It was the burthen and theme of that voice which cried in the wilderness, *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight*. And can it *now* be a word of less fearful import? No, surely, but of more awakening power; in proportion as the light of the Gospel has thrown all our sins into a deeper shade. Jesus Christ has indeed done wonderful things for sinful men; he has purchased forgiveness for them with his blood; but it is forgiveness for the penitent believer only; and in exact proportion to the greatness of his mercies to the penitent, is the sinfulness of the impenitent increased.

What, then, is repentance? It is a sense of our sins; a sorrow for our sins; and a conversion or turning from our sins to God; altogether constituting that, which the original word indicates, a change of sentiments and feelings. This, it is evident, is a work, in which both the understanding and the affections bear a part; but principally the affections: every thing

of repentance, except the speculative knowledge of sin and its consequences, goes on in the heart : *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

Many men know that they have sinned, and what their sin deserves : but this reasonable conviction of sin, which no man can avoid, who hears the Word of God, and permits himself to think at all, is an involuntary act of the understanding. Under such a conviction as this, the devils believe and tremble : but they repent not ; for then the will must be engaged ; that is a work for the heart. It is not, generally speaking, a clearer knowledge of sin, a greater certainty of God's wrath, that men require, but a different set of affections and inclinations ; *Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you new hearts and a new spirit.*

The great secret of bringing ourselves, by the help of God's grace, to this repentant state, is the habit of applying to our own particular case the prohibitions and threats of God's Word. We know that they are universally true ; for *God is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent* : but we do not experience their full efficacy, as motives to repentance and

amendment, till we make, in seriousness of heart, a particular application of them to ourselves. It should be the Christian's practice, when he hears the authoritative precepts, and uncompromising prohibitions of the Gospel, to ask of his own conscience, Are these, or any of these, amongst the things which *I* have done, when I ought not, or left undone, when I ought to have done them ? They are specially addressed to me ; and it is not a question which I can put by with safety : I must judge myself, if I would not be judged of the Lord. The very moment that we set ourselves in good earnest to apply this test to our consciences, we shall perceive abundant reasons for doing so ; our own manifest faultiness ; the strictness of the divine law ; the omniscience and justice of him with whom we have to do, are arguments, which soon bring us to the conclusion of holy Job, *I have sinned ; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men ?*<sup>4</sup>

Our ignorance of that which we are sensible that we ought to know ; our want of thankfulness for the innumerable mercies of God ; our abuse of his longsuffering ; our unprofitableness under the means of grace ; our insensibility to warnings ; our relapses after repentance, and

<sup>4</sup> Job vii. 20.

returns to sin :—all these open a wide and melancholy range for bitter thoughts and searchings of heart, the end of which will be, to the ungodly and irresolute, despair and recklessness; but to the sincere, and earnest, and humble Christian, a determination to confess his unworthiness, and to throw himself upon God's mercy through Jesus Christ; *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*

A serious examination of ourselves, and a sincere confession of our sins to God, are the first steps towards repentance; and repentance, rendered efficacious by the blood of Christ, places us within the verge of God's favour. We do not persuade the members of our Church, that their peace with him is to be made on easy terms; we do not tell them that *any* kind of regret for sins, followed by confession to the priest, and by penance, performed or compounded for, will procure remission of sins; nor do we tell them, that by any act of penitence, however solemn and however sincere, they can make *satisfaction* for sins. But what we do tell them is this; that with a real contrition of heart, arising from a deep conviction of their own sinfulness, and the misery of being at enmity with

God, they must set themselves to reckon up, and to confess their faults, to deprecate the just anger of God, and to supplicate for mercy and pardon: not for any worthiness in themselves, or their acts of penitence, but for the sake of him who died that sinners might be forgiven; rejoicing in the certainty of that wonderful dispensation, by which the mercy of God has been reconciled with his justice; and finding in that assurance somewhat to add seriousness to their confession, earnestness to their prayers, and confidence to their hopes.

As to the outward and mechanical acts of religious discipline, we tell them, that they are profitable, to mortify our appetites, the causes of sin; but not to make expiation for sin itself; that we must deny ourselves, in order to prevent future offences, not to make satisfaction for those which are past. Guilt already contracted may be deeply felt, and bitterly bewailed; but can be washed out only by the blood of Christ. A real faith in the atonement which he has made, as it is the surest safeguard against sin, so is it the only effectual remedy for it. Upon no other foundation can we build our hopes of forgiveness, nor our belief that repentance will be available, or reformation practicable.



Lastly, let me observe, that repentance is no easy task ; it does not follow naturally after sin. Rarely indeed does it happen that any man, except the thoroughly reprobate and hard of heart, can break the law of God, without experiencing afterwards some feeling of remorse. But remorse is not repentance. While every thing goes on well with us, and the ordinary duties of religion are not omitted, it requires a considerable effort of mind to judge ourselves more exactly and severely than the world judges; and even, according to appearances, than God himself may be supposed to judge. In fact, genuine repentance is not attainable without grace ; and grace must be sought for in prayer ; and perhaps there is hardly any prayer, which a Christian has occasion to prefer more frequently than this, Lord, give me grace to know my own sinfulness: *Who can understand his errors ? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults.*<sup>5</sup>

I entreat you, therefore, to take this opportunity of retiring within yourselves for the purpose of self-examination. Review the transactions of the past year, for the purpose of discovering, not the good deeds which you have done ; but wherein you have offended God ; wherein you

<sup>5</sup> Psalm xix. 12.

have deviated from the strict rule of Gospel purity and charity. Think of the mercies you have received, and the unworthy returns which you have made for them; of your inattention to the claims of Christian love; of opportunities neglected, or misused; of cold and formal prayers; of sabbaths unsanctified; of your Bible unread; of your Redeemer's invitation slighted, or refused; of light or sinful words; of unholy or uncharitable thoughts.

Not one amongst us can say, that nothing of all this concerns him. In one or other of these particulars we have all been wanting; too many of us, I fear, in every one. Consider, then, I beseech you, since there can be no remission of sins without repentance, no repentance without self-examination, no self-examination without seriousness of heart, consider what your determination ought to be. *Let us search, and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Lam. iii. 40. That I may not be said to have misrepresented the Roman Catholic doctrine of the efficacy of penance, I will transcribe the words of Massillon, who, in his Sermon on Ash Wednesday, speaks of the Lent Fast as being imposed upon the whole body of the faithful "*pour appaiser la colere du Seigneur; faire cesser les fléaux qui nous affligent, expier nos iniquités,*" &c. And again, "*Je ne parle pas des jeûnes, des macérations, des austérités, que les vrais fidèles pratiquent en ces jours de salut, et qu'ils offrent au Seigneur comme un sacrifice d'expiation pour le réconcilier avec son peuple.*"

# SERMON XVIII.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

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JOHN X. 27, 28.

*My sheep hear my voice : and I know them ; and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life ; and they shall never perish ; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

AMONGST the various characters and offices which are ascribed to the Messiah in the writings of the prophets, there is none more beautifully descriptive of the gracious purposes of his mission than that of a shepherd. When Isaiah calls upon Jerusalem to say unto the cities of Judah, at the Messiah's Advent—*Behold your God* ; he describes in the first place the indications of his omnipotence, by which his kingdom was to be established in the world, *Behold, the*

*Lord God will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him, behold, his reward is with him; and his work before him.*<sup>1</sup> But immediately, as though he were apprehensive of exciting terror, by announcing the desire of all nations as a mighty king and ruler, invested with all the most awful attributes of the Deity, the prophet reverses the picture, and represents the condescension and kindness of the Anointed, under the pleasing similitude of a careful and affectionate shepherd; *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

This description our Saviour applied to himself, upon more than one occasion, as recorded in the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel; and the language in which he has described the nature of the pastoral office in general, and of his own in particular, as the great Shepherd of the sheep, renders this a very interesting portion of Scripture.

In the first place, our Saviour speaks of his Church as of a sheepfold; a sacred enclosure, fenced in and distinguished by everlasting barriers from a wicked world; yet not such an

<sup>1</sup> Isa. xl. 10.

enclosure as that in which the Jewish polity was contained and circumscribed, incapable of enlargement and extension ; nor tenanted by one peculiar tribe, the exclusive heritage of the Lord claiming to be *the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand*. The wall of partition, which separates the fold of Christ from the world, though eternal, is not irremovable ; but is continually advanced and extended by the labours of faithful pastors under the blessing of the Spirit : yet it *is* still a wall of partition ; and the flock and household of Christ, which are within, are to be distinguished by the same marks of difference from the strangers and aliens without, whether their numbers be great or small.

But our Saviour speaks of the door of this sheepfold, and says that *whosoever entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.—But he that entereth in by the door, is the shepherd of the sheep*. By the shepherd, who entered in by the door, our Saviour designated, in the first instance, himself. He entered into his ministerial office through the door of that commission which invested him with the duties and the prerogatives of the Messiah ; a door of entrance opened by the Holy Spirit at

his command. But he presently adds, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.* As he entered into God's fold through the Spirit, so from that time forward he himself was to be the door of admission, both to the sheep and their appointed shepherds. St. Paul declares himself to be not a self-constituted guide, nor appointed of men; *but by Jesus Christ*;<sup>2</sup> and in his name, and in the character of his servants did the Apostles claim the attention and belief of mankind.

Here then we have one infallible criterion of a true, authorized pastor. Has he entered into the fold, in that capacity, through Jesus Christ, and does he persuade men to follow him through the same strait gate of entrance into the fold? Does he rest his spiritual authority upon Jesus Christ alone, or upon any more questionable ground? In other words, does he claim our attention as a servant and a preacher of Jesus Christ, as an asserter of the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel; or in any other character? For instance, as enforcing what are called the principles of eternal truth and morality, the conclusions of sound philosophy, the sacred obligations of virtue, as

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 1.

inferred from the constitution of man? Does he make the Gospel of Jesus Christ at once the credentials of his mission, and his code of instructions; or does he appeal to any other authority as a preacher of religion? In the one case he enters in by the door, and is the shepherd of the sheep; in the other, he is a thief and a robber; for he despoils the souls of those, whom he undertakes to instruct, of their *strong consolation* and refuge; of the very essence of revealed religion; of the precious gift purchased for them by the blood of Christ; of the real foundation of hope; for *other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*<sup>a</sup>

*To him the porter openeth.* This is an image introduced merely to complete and embellish the similitude. It is an admitted rule, that in the interpretation of parables, we are not to press every minute circumstance and expression, as having a symbolical meaning: but that we are to look to the bearing and intention of the whole. When our Lord described the true shepherd, as admitted by the person who kept the gate of the sheepfold, he intended merely to denote that free and authorized ingress and egress, which

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 11.

an appointed and approved guardian of the fold would naturally have. Yet we shall not transgress the rules of sound interpretation, if even from this incidental image we draw an inference, that it is incumbent upon those, who are entrusted with the charge of admitting pastors into the fold of Christ, to use especial care in excluding all who refuse to enter in by the true spiritual door; all who are not prepared to say with St. Paul, when called upon to exhibit the testimonial which is indispensable to their admission, *I determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*<sup>4</sup> But then they must know him as he is set forth in the Scriptures rightly interpreted, in the consistent scheme of Gospel belief and practice, not in the partial or distorted outlines of enthusiasm.

What follows, is a more pregnant and instructive division of the parable: *And the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice.* They recognise him for the good shepherd, because he feeds them with the true

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.



food of the soul; not with the unsubstantial and unsatisfying *hay and stubble* of man's wisdom; not with the *beggarly elements* of the world; of human tradition and false philosophy; but with the *sincere milk of the word*;<sup>5</sup> the pure unadulterated truth, as it is in Jesus. *He maketh them to lie down in the green pastures of the Gospel Canaan, and leadeth them beside the waters of quietness.*<sup>6</sup> They therefore *hear his voice*; cheerfully attend to his directions, and gladly follow him; *and he calleth his own sheep by name*; addresses them with that affectionate and particular earnestness, which is produced by a sincere and conscientious anxiety for their growth *in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*;<sup>7</sup> and by a constant recollection of the solemn charge which has been laid upon him by the Lord—*Feed my sheep.*

*And when he putteth forth his sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him.* He does not drive them with unkind rebuke, nor compel them by fierce anathema, or the goad of persecution, to walk in a narrow way of his own appointment: but he shows them the path of life, as well by the light of divine instruction, as

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 2.<sup>6</sup> Psalm xxiii. 2.<sup>7</sup> 2 Pet. iii. 18.

by the track of his own footsteps; leads them gently onward by the attraction of his own example; and makes them, by the aid of the Spirit, without whom no man cometh unto God, *followers of him, even as he also is of Christ.*<sup>8</sup>

*And a stranger they will not follow; but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.* Unauthorized, or unqualified intruders into the pastoral office, they detect by their voice; their speech betrayeth them. If there be no characteristic marks of Christian doctrine, no enforcement of the peculiar truths of the Gospel, no appeal to the supreme authority of the written Word, they give to the flock of Christ that which satisfieth not; *the meat which perisheth, and not that which endureth unto everlasting life.*<sup>9</sup> And the soul turns away unsatisfied, and unrefreshed, from a repast which is not seasoned with the salt of Christian doctrine. But let the flock of Christ beware of passing a rash judgment upon those, who claim to be their appointed pastors; and of hastily condemning, or presumptuously despising every mode of instruction, which does not answer to their own opinion of what it ought to be. Their taste may be vitiated and

<sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 1.

<sup>9</sup> John vi. 27.

depraved; their conscience may not be in a state to relish the sound doctrines of the Gospel; they may labour under a morbid fastidiousness, or the unnatural cravings of a highly wrought enthusiasm. They may not know the voice of the shepherd, because their ears are closed by prejudice, or from long familiarity with the voice of others, yet no true pastors. Or they may dislike and flee from it, because it is harsh and unmusical; not unfaithful, or unfriendly, but unable to deliver the message of peace, with persuasive and graceful eloquence.

Undoubtedly, if the doctrine delivered to Christ's flock, be not distinctly the doctrine of Christ, it is not the food to which they are entitled in virtue of their relation to him. If they obtain nothing, from those who are set apart for the Gospel, but that which may be had from the trivial philosophy of the schools, they may indeed exclaim, with the prophet, *my leanness; my leanness: wo unto me; the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously with me.*<sup>10</sup> But if their teacher sets before them the whole counsel of God, in its nobler features of distinction, the sinfulness and misery of man, the free mercy of God,

<sup>10</sup> Is. xxiv. 16.

the necessity of repentance, the meritoriousness of Christ's obedience, and the efficacy of his atoning sacrifice of himself; the certainty of a judgment to come, when all men shall receive according to the fruits of their faith—if these truths be insisted upon, and the duties of charity and holiness be not kept in the background, nor treated as secondary and unimportant questions, then have the flock no right to complain, that their appointed overseer neglects *to feed the Church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood*; <sup>11</sup> with whatever degree of talent or eloquence he may execute his commission.

Our Saviour then declares, that he is himself the door, through which both the shepherd of his flock, and the sheep, must enter into the fold of God's covenanted mercy and protection; and that he is himself, in a preeminent and primary sense, the good shepherd; the prototype and example of all the delegated pastors of his flock, in carefulness, in tenderness, in activity; and, above all, in the devotion of himself for their preservation: *the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep*. And of what kind was the love which prompted such a

<sup>11</sup> Acts xx. 28.

sacrifice? Even such a love as that inconceivable affection, with which the Father loveth the Son, and the Son the Father; for such is the meaning of the words, *as the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.* But how could Christ be said to lay down his life for the sheep? Was it only to confirm the truth of his doctrines and precepts, and to convince his followers of his sincerity? Such a forced and jejune interpretation is precluded by our Saviour's own expression, *greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friends—* not to instruct nor to strengthen; but, if we may believe an Apostle, to save them from death; *God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us—being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him—when we were enemies, we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son—we joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.*<sup>12</sup>

Christ, therefore, is not merely our shepherd in his character of instructor: it is not merely that he has supplied us with the bread of life in his

<sup>12</sup> Rom. v. 8—11.

Word. He came upon earth, not only to seek the lost sheep of Israel, and to lead them out of a wicked world into the fold of divine instruction, and so to save them from sin ; but he came to save them from the curse and consequences of sin, by his own death. The curse of the law was upon all who had gone astray ; the wrath of God was decreed against it ; and it was not all the teaching which could be given, nor the conviction that could be wrought, even by the inspired messengers of God, which could remove the burthen, or cancel the sentence : but it was blotted out by the blood of Christ, and nailed to his cross, as a trophy, not over ignorance, but over sin and death. When the Son of God, in the moment of expiring agony and resignation, exclaimed, *it is finished*, he declared, not that the revelation of God's will and counsels was then completed, (for it was not,) but that man was pardoned ; that the covenant of reconciliation was sealed : and this was his real triumph over the principalities and powers of darkness ; and it is in this character of a redeemer, and a reconciler, that we must receive him and walk in him. It was on this ground that the blessed Jesus himself more especially laid claim to the title of the

good shepherd, and spoke of his voluntary sacrifice of himself, as the most convincing evidence, not of the truth of his doctrines, (for that was abundantly proved by many unquestionable miracles,) but of his surpassing love for mankind.

In this peculiar and exalted sense, not excluding, but transcending all other senses of the term, is Jesus Christ our shepherd; and not ours only, but the shepherd of all mankind, who are *his people and the sheep of his pasture*. He is *Lord over all*; <sup>13</sup> *power is given unto him over all flesh*:<sup>14</sup> he died for all; and the door of his fold stands open, that all may enter in thereat. But it is a *strait gate, and few there be that find it*.<sup>15</sup> And there is a smaller, and more peculiar flock, who are outwardly separated from the world, and bear his mark upon them, and are called by his name. There is a still smaller, and a still more peculiar family of his own, whom the Father has more especially given him, who have savingly applied to themselves the merits of that sacrifice which was offered in behalf of all; whom he enables to hear his voice, and to follow him, both in faith and practice, *whithersoever he goeth*.

<sup>13</sup> Rom. x. 12.<sup>14</sup> John xvii. 2.<sup>15</sup> Matt. vii. 14.

*And unto them, said our Saviour, I give eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. He giveth eternal life to those who hear his voice, and follow him; who believe in him and obey him. To hear his voice, is not merely to listen to the moral precepts of the Gospel; but to receive Jesus himself as the giver of eternal life. As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.<sup>16</sup> But then, on the other hand, to follow him, is not only to receive him with a speculative belief, as being alone able to save us, but to tread in the footsteps of his most holy life, and to walk in the way of his commandments. If we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.<sup>17</sup>*

*And they shall never perish.* They, who are Christ's by faith, and in obedience, are secure in time and eternity. There is nothing in this world, nor beyond it, which can affect their title to life eternal; for it is written in the everlasting Gospel, and entered in the book of God's remembrance, and placed beyond the power of

<sup>16</sup> John i. 12.

<sup>17</sup> 1 John i. 7.



the evil one. But they are so secure, only while they follow Christ. *They shall never perish*; that is, by his fault; for want of his protection and support. He will be always at hand, as a careful shepherd, to guard his sheep against the perils of the wilderness through which they are journeying. His *Spirit helpeth their infirmities*; <sup>18</sup> raises them when they fall, animates their courage, alleviates their distresses, sanctifies them wholly, and preserves them blameless unto the coming of their Lord. But all this implies, on their part, an honest and sincere desire to know the truth, and to persevere in it; and on the part of Christ, such a tender regard, and such a powerful protection, as shall abundantly secure them, while they continue to hear his voice, and to follow him; not such as shall forcibly constrain them to be saved, or secure them from the consequences of their voluntary weakness, or from dangers courted and sought for by themselves.

Our Saviour then declares, that he is the shepherd of the sheep, in right of that ownership which has been transferred to him by the Father; and that together with the dominion over them, he was invested with the power of

<sup>18</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

protecting and saving them by Him who is above all: *My Father which gave them me, is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.* It may be asked, if God gives to Christ those who are to be peculiarly his own, who are to be effectually protected, and finally saved by him, what have we to do, but to wait quietly till such a transfer shall be made, and some assurance of it given us by the Spirit? especially as we are told elsewhere by Christ himself, that no man cometh unto him except he be drawn of God.<sup>19</sup> Now it is certain, that no man can effectually come to Christ as a Saviour, unless he be drawn towards him by the Spirit. He cannot even hear his voice, that is, understand the doctrines of the Gospel; much less follow him, or fulfil its requirements, without the grace of God "preventing him that he may have a good will, and working with him when he has that will." Yet undoubtedly there is a certain frame and posture of mind in the unregenerate man, which fits him, although it does not entitle him, to be a recipient of divine grace. The honest and good heart, of which our Saviour speaks, as required in a hearer of the Word, must exist, before the Word is

<sup>19</sup> John vi. 44.

heard at all; and although it be the gift of Him, from whom cometh *every good and every perfect gift*—as our reason, and senses, and bodily powers are his gifts—yet it is not his gift in a special sense, as given arbitrarily to some, while it is withholden from others. But it is given in some degree or other to all, to be improved by them; and upon the degrees of that improvement depends the fitness of different men for that preventing grace, which disposes them to seek and to love the truth. Thus, in the beginnings of the Gospel, God gave to Christ his Apostles, because they were judged, by him who *is a discerner of the thoughts*,<sup>20</sup> to be qualified for that high office by their simplicity and singleness of heart; and in that sense our Saviour declared that they belonged to God, before they were consecrated by his Spirit to the ministry of the Gospel; *I have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me: and they have kept thy word.*<sup>21</sup> Cornelius was called to a knowledge of Christ, and given to him by God; but it was not until his prayers and alms had ascended for a memorial before him, indicating, not his worthiness, but his fitness for a more

<sup>20</sup> Heb. iv. 12.

<sup>21</sup> John xvii. 6.

perfect knowledge of God, and for a larger measure of his Spirit.

But although it is presumptuous to imagine that we have been so irrevocably and inalienably given to Christ, as to make it impossible for us to be separated from him; and although it is unsafe to judge of our interest in him by any other criterion than that of a *fruitful* faith; yet to those, who are able to look to him, as the shepherd of their souls, with that comfort and confidence which encourages them to persist in a consistent course of godliness, not with that assurance which would make them reckless of the dangers by which they are beset,—to them it is a source of unspeakable joy, to reflect that they belong to one who can make his strength manifest in their weakness, who is all-powerful to save, who is invested with the supreme sovereignty and control over all things that are in heaven and in earth, and that are under the earth; who can do for us all that God can do, for he is with God and is God; *I and my Father are one*. It is a matter of inexhaustible comfort, to know that we are in the hands of him, who has already declared the feelings with which he regards his little flock that is in the midst of a naughty world; *I pray for them: I pray not for the*

*world ; but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine : and all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them.*

And this is the perfection of that joy which the Christian feels, in contemplating Jesus Christ as his Shepherd ; that he is one with God. He is not merely his instructor, his guide, his delegated guardian ; it is not only that, as a Saviour, he has once offered himself a sacrifice for sin : but he is still his almighty king, protector, and friend ; *The Lord himself is my Shepherd, therefore I shall not want.* Jesus Christ has declared himself one with the Father ; not merely one in counsel and intention, as some pretend ; but one in power ; *All things that the Father hath are mine.* If one in power, then certainly one in nature : and it is this perfect unity of the Father and the Son, in purpose and in power, in love towards man, in the gracious design of redemption, and in the mightiness of its execution, which renders the Gospel revelation so adequate to all the wants of our fallen nature, so abundantly satisfying to all the desires of the soul.

These are the doctrines, upon which every shepherd, whom the Lord hath set over a part of his flock, to give them their portion of

meat in due season, must strenuously insist, if he would make his pastoral office answer all the ends of a Gospel ministry, and himself escape that rebuke which was uttered against the unfaithful shepherds of Israel, *Ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened; neither have ye healed that which was sick; neither have ye bound up that which was broken; neither have ye brought again that which was driven away: neither have ye sought that which was lost.*<sup>22</sup> And these are the doctrines, upon which the flock of Christ must feed when they are proposed to them, as that nourishing and vivifying food, which can be had in *his* fold alone; which the children of this generation loathe and turn away from with contempt, or aversion, as transcending the grasp of their reason, or opposing the bent of their inclinations; but in which the humble and sincere Christian finds the true strength of his motives, and the certainty of his hopes; his security against the power of evil during his continuance in the flesh; and his title to *that crown of glory that fadeth not away*, which will be given to him *when the chief Shepherd shall appear.*<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ezek. xxxiv. 3.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Pet. v. 4.

# SERMON XIX.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST.



1 COR. I. 23, 24.<sup>1</sup>

*But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews a stumbling-block; and unto the Greeks foolishness: but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

THE preaching of the Gospel St. Paul terms *the preaching of the cross*;<sup>2</sup> nor can he find any expression more characteristic of its doctrines than that in the text, *We preach Christ crucified*; and having said that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, *i. e.* to the obstinate unbelievers, *foolishness*, he adds, that it pleased God by this foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. The doctrine of the

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Good Friday.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. i. 18.

cross is therefore a saving doctrine, a vital doctrine, a fundamental doctrine of Christianity; and we hold it to be no less indispensable now, than it was in St. Paul's time, that every minister of the Gospel should be able to say with truth, *We preach Christ crucified*. That wonderful and glorious truth is still to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks, or the disputers of this world, foolishness : but to them which are called, who have heard the voice of God in the Gospel, and have been inclined by the Spirit of God to give ear to it ; who have had grace to bring every thought into subjection to Christ, and to receive with meekness the Word of life ; it is *the power of God, and the wisdom of God*.

*We preach Christ crucified*. Does the Apostle mean simply to say, that he proclaims the historical fact, that Jesus died upon the cross ? Surely not : about that there was no dispute, either on the part of Jew or of Greek : on the contrary, it was the very ground of their objections. He evidently means, *We preach a crucified Saviour, as the distinguishing and saving doctrine of the Gospel ; unto us which are saved, it is the power of God : in other words, it is the power of God unto salvation to every one*



*that believeth.*<sup>3</sup> This doctrine was to the Jews a stumbling-block, or stone of offence; not because they had any difficulty in admitting that sin might be expiated by sacrifice, a notion which was perfectly familiar to them, and characteristic of their own religion; but because they could not bring themselves to believe, that any person could be their Messiah, who had submitted to such an extremity of humiliation and disgrace. But to the Greeks, on the other hand, it would be no conclusive argument against the truth of a system, that its author had undergone a violent, or even an ignominious death; for some of their own most eminent and revered philosophers had suffered death, for imputed innovations in matters of religion. At all events, there was no foolishness in the notion, that a very excellent and wise teacher was unjustly deprived of life. The foolishness to them was, that the death of Jesus on the cross should be declared to be the means of procuring salvation to mankind. This was a strange doctrine; not to be accounted for on their principles of philosophy; that Jesus Christ should be offered up upon the cross, as a satisfaction for the sins of the whole world; and that, in token of that

<sup>3</sup> Rom. i. 16.

satisfaction, God should have raised him up from the dead on the third day.

When the Apostles were called upon to prove the truth of the religion which they preached, they appealed to the resurrection; as being that feature of it, which demonstrated and established all the rest; for, as St. Paul justly observed, *if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*<sup>4</sup> But in stating the *doctrines* of the Gospel, we find that great Apostle continually speaking of the crucifixion of Christ, as the representative, or, at least, as the most prominent and important of them all; *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*<sup>5</sup> He tells the Galatians, that *before their eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth, crucified among them;*<sup>6</sup> and again, *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ.*<sup>7</sup> Such expressions as these are wholly inconsistent with the supposition, that the death of Jesus was considered by St. Paul as being no more than the last attestation of sincerity to the truth of his religion. When the Apostle wishes to prove the certainty of the Gospel, he refers to the resurrection, and not to the crucifixion only.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 17.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Gal. iii. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Gal. vi. 14.

But why need we speculate upon the degree of importance which St. Paul attached to the doctrine of the cross, when we have his memorable declaration to the Ephesians, which, one would think, ought to be sufficient to prevent any believer in the Christian scriptures from questioning the doctrine of the atonement? *Now in Christ Jesus ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ—he is our peace—having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments—and that he might reconcile both unto God, in one body, by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*<sup>8</sup> He distinctly states that the cross, that is, the sufferings of Christ upon the cross, was the instrument of reconciling man to God. And this is the uniform language of the Christian scriptures: this is the doctrine, which was declared by our Lord himself to his disciples, at a time when they were not yet able to comprehend its true import; and which, after his ascension, they insisted upon, under the influence of his Spirit, as the most distinguishing and attractive feature of the religion which they proclaimed; Christ crucified for man's redemption.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. ii. 13—16.

That a very great difference is wrought in the state of those who become Christians; that they are made children of God by adoption and grace, having before been children of wrath; whatever offence it may give to the pride of human reason, is the unquestionable doctrine of the New Testament. It lies upon the very surface of the Christian records; and it requires much ingenuity, and perverseness of interpretation, not to find it there. If then we inquire by what means this change has been effected; we are told, by the blood of Christ. In whatever manner, or degree, mankind may have deserved, by their sins, the just wrath of God, this at least we know, that it is no longer inevitable; that our obedience, if it springs from faith in Christ, will be accepted; or, which is the same thing as to its results, that our disobedience will be pardoned.

If we inquire, in the next place, what satisfaction can have been made for our sins—for of ourselves we are no more able to make any amends, or reparation now, than our forefathers were at any period of the world—our own reason can give us no answer: but the Scriptures tell us, that the death of Christ has effected it. He was crucified for our sins; his

blood was shed, and his life poured out, as an atonement, or peace-making for us. There is no other kind of atonement, no other means of peace pointed out in the Word of God; but this is set forth in language as plain, as strong, and as affecting, as the importance of the doctrine required.

The principal passages of Scripture, which assert, or infer, this leading doctrine of the covenant of grace, are, it is to be hoped, familiar to your minds: but it is so important, and especially in these days, in which *rational* Christianity, as it is called, is cried up, in opposition to that which we hold to be scriptural and evangelical, it is so important, that all Christians should have a serious and reasonable conviction of its being indeed a scripture doctrine, an essential feature of Gospel truth, that I shall not hesitate to recapitulate some of the most striking expressions, in which the Spirit has discoursed with us touching this great mystery of godliness. Christian, believest thou the Scriptures? I know that thou believest. If then at any time you feel in your own mind any doubt, or misgivings, as to the foundation of your hopes in Christ crucified; have recourse, not to the inconclusive deter-

minations of an imperfect reason ; but to the authority which you admit as supreme ; to the law and the testimony ; to the plain and repeated declarations of Scripture, that is, of God's Holy Spirit ; whose authority, to the pious and humble mind, is decisive, satisfactory, and final. The following, without referring you to each particular passage, are some of the texts which seem to me to preclude all question as to the reality of that atonement, which has been made by Jesus Christ for the sins of mankind.

*The Son of man came, to give his life a ransom for many.<sup>9</sup> Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.<sup>10</sup> Feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.<sup>11</sup> Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ ; whom God hath set forth, to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.<sup>12</sup> When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.<sup>13</sup> God*

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xx. 28. λύτρον, the price paid for the redemption of a captive, properly rendered by the word *ransom*, i. e. *redemption*, of which the French *rançon* is an abbreviation.

<sup>10</sup> John i. 29.

<sup>11</sup> Acts xx. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Rom. iii. 24. The word, which is here rendered propitiation, means properly a *propitiatory victim*, δαστήριον. In 1 John ii. 2, the word signifies the propitiation itself, δασμός.

<sup>13</sup> Rom. v. 6.

*commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him: for if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*<sup>14</sup>

And in the chapter from which the text is taken, having declared that he preached Christ crucified, St. Paul concludes that *Christ Jesus is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.* Again; *And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died.*<sup>15</sup> *Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.*<sup>16</sup> *Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.*<sup>17</sup> *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.*<sup>18</sup> *Who gave himself a ransom for all.*<sup>19</sup> *And as it is appointed unto*

<sup>14</sup> Rom. v. 8, 9. The death of Christ is here so distinctly spoken of as the mean, or medium of our atonement, or reconciliation with God, *κατηλλάγημεν τῷ Θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ*, that the doctrine of the Atonement by his blood would stand immovably upon this single text of Scripture.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. viii. 11.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Gal. i. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. i. 7.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 6.

*men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.*<sup>20</sup>

The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is written for the express purpose of showing the intrinsic value and efficacy of the death of Christ, as a sacrifice for the sins of the world ; and as being the instrument of those substantial benefits, of which the sacrifices of the law were only shadows. They were offered, year by year, for the sins of the Jewish people ; whereas by the will of God, says the Apostle, *we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all*—who, *after he had offered one sacrifice for sins, for ever sat down on the right hand of God:—for by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*<sup>21</sup> Again, St. Peter speaks of our being *redeemed, or purchased, with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot :*<sup>22</sup> and St. John says that *the blood of Jesus Christ cleunseth us*

<sup>20</sup> Heb. ix. 27, 28. εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνεγκεῖν ἁμαρτίας. This one expression, compared with Isa. liii. 11, and Levit. vi. 26, ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ ἀναφέρειν αὐτήν (τὴν ἁμαρτίαν) ἔδεται αὐτήν, places the expiatory nature of Christ's death beyond dispute.

<sup>21</sup> Heb. x. 10—14.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Pet. i. 19.



*from all sin;*<sup>23</sup> that *He loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*<sup>24</sup> These are not all the texts of Scripture which speak the same language: but these are surely sufficient to throw a clear and concentrated light upon the propitiatory sacrifice of the cross, and to invest it with the character of a fundamental doctrine of Christianity. In what sense can we understand them, except as asserting, that God forgives our sins, for the sake of Christ's death? and, which is a most important consideration, in what other sense could they have been understood by those persons to whom the Apostles wrote, who were familiar both with the theory and practice of sacrifice, as a method of expiating sin? If the sacred writers had not intended to convey the notion, that the death of Jesus Christ was a real sacrifice for sin, they would carefully have abstained from the use of language, which could not fail to be so understood by those to whom their writings were addressed.

It is upon the strength of these declarations of Scripture, which no ingenuity of misinterpretation can elude, that we feel ourselves authorized to preach Christ crucified. Authorized

<sup>23</sup> 1 John i. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. i. 5.

did I say? yea rather constrained, by the most sacred obligation to him, who has committed to us the oversight of that Church which he hath purchased with his own blood. Wo is me if I preach not that doctrine! a wonderful doctrine! to the Jews a stumbling-block; and to the reasoner of this world foolishness; but nevertheless the doctrine of the Gospel; and a doctrine of unspeakable efficacy and comfort to those who have embraced it: *Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

Let us notice, in a few words, two principal objections to this doctrine. The innocent is punished for the guilty—how is that to be reconciled with the justice of God? In the first place, the sufferings of Christ were voluntary; not inflicted by a superior power, but taken upon himself; and therefore the word *punishment* does not exactly express the real state of the case. The innocent suffers for, or instead of the guilty: that perhaps is nearer; although, even that expression, perhaps, may not be quite exact. This may be unaccountable; but is it contrary to justice, that is, to divine justice? If so, then is it contrary to that justice, that the course of events should be so ordered by Providence, as that good

people should suffer for evil people ; which is frequently the case. Suppose that a son should step forward to save a father from death, and submit to it in his stead, would such an incident be any impeachment of God's justice ? But what God *permits* in one instance, he may *ordain* in any, with such variety of circumstances as the case requires ; and if in one instance he permits the innocent to suffer for the guilty, we cannot say that it is unjust for him to do so in any.

The other objection is, that this feature in the scheme of divine mercy, the reasons of which are confessedly incomprehensible to us, is derogatory to the divine power ; that the intervention of a third party in the work of redemption is wholly unnecessary ; that God might as well have forgiven men without any mediator to make atonement. Certainly God might have conferred his mercy on mankind in any way which seemed good to him. But our inquiry is, not what he *might* have done, but what he *has* done ; and on that head we have, we *can* have no authentic source of information but the Scriptures. God might have bestowed all his benefits upon mankind without employing intermediate means. But this has

not been the method of his Providence, in any of his dealings with man ; and we know not why it should be, in the plan of redemption. He does not bestow the good fruits of the earth upon man, without labour ; he does not vouchsafe his spiritual gifts, without the intervention of prayer ; and why should he be called upon to confer on mankind the greatest blessing of all, without employing such means as he himself might judge most fit ? Certainly it must be acknowledged, that if we admit the doctrine of the atonement to be true, nothing can more forcibly impress us with the real nature and danger of sin, than that God should have employed such wonderful means to remedy its pernicious effects. And for that reason, if for no other, we might well be satisfied with his wisdom and goodness, in adopting the method which he did, to work out our salvation, and in revealing to us the certainty of that great mystery of godliness.

If any argument can be imagined, powerful enough to bring us to a just sense of our own sinfulness, and of God's exceeding mercy, it is surely this ; that a Being, far superior to all created beings, men or angels, united with God, as no other being is united, came down from

heaven; was *found in fashion as a man*; and suffered a painful and ignominious death; in obedience, as he declared, to the will of God; and for the purpose of rescuing mankind from the otherwise inevitable consequences of their sins. To a heart, convinced of the fact, sensible of its own defects and wants, this surely was a theme for wonder, for gratitude, for obedience. So overpowering is the consideration of it to the soul which can disengage itself for a time from all worldly selfishness and low desires, and which feels the infinite superiority of things eternal to things temporal, that we need not wonder, if it should form the chief object of a Christian's contemplation, as it is the sole basis of his hopes; *I determined to know nothing amongst you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*

From the deceits and cruelties of a world which knows not God; from its sickening vanities, its short-sighted wisdom, its deceitful confidence, the Christian turns, in imagination, his eyes towards Calvary, to contemplate the spectacle of Christ crucified. To the Jew, or the Greek, it is the last struggle of an unfortunate pretender to divine authority: *he saved others, himself he cannot save.* To the Christian it is

the glorious combat of Christ with sin. The agonies of that patient and merciful Redeemer are a fearful spectacle to the prince of darkness. He knows that they are part of that payment, which is to be made for the redemption of mankind from his dark dominion. The strokes of pitiless executioners, which drive the nails through the hands and feet of the suffering Jesus, are death-blows to the power of sin. The seeming conqueror is vanquished in the moment of victory. When Jesus gives up the Ghost, the reign of sin expires; and the life of man revives; his eternal life; his capacity of everlasting happiness. The Son of God is himself the trophy of his own conquest; the emblem and the pledge of salvation achieved.

Does this description seem too strong? Hear the words of an Apostle: *And you, being dead in your sins, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened, together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross: and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Col. ii. 13—15.

How striking an image of the glorious effects of the crucifixion! The sentence of condemnation against a race of fallen sinners stands recorded in the register of eternal justice. The written letter of God's violated law is witness against them. How shall they escape from the wrath to come? Where find an intercessor or avenger? Principalities and powers of darkness exult in the anticipated desolation of the reasonable world: *this is their hour*. And is there none to help? Lo, where the Son of God ascends the chariot of the cross; grasps with the right-hand of supreme authority the record of man's condemnation, nails it in triumph to his bed of death; and while the enemies of our salvation sicken at the sound, he exclaims, *Father, it is finished*. The work is done; Christ expires, and man lives for ever. *It is finished*: the good fight is fought, the conquest is achieved: its *certainty* will ere long be attested by the glories of the resurrection. Its *greatness* is even now declared by the concurrent and awful testimony of heaven and earth. The sun, the sky, the solid rocks, the sacred veil of the temple, and the voice of the awe-stricken centurion, proclaim the crucified Jesus to be conqueror over all the adverse powers of death and hell.

My brethren, we preach Christ crucified. That most holy and comfortable truth is implied, and taken for granted, in the whole of our teaching. All our exhortations to repentance, all our encouragements to hope, all our declarations of God's mercy to sinners, have this one foundation, Christ crucified. When we tell you to believe in Christ, we mean, Christ crucified. When we persuade you to do, or to abstain from any thing for Christ's sake, we mean, for the sake of Christ crucified. If we pray in Christ's name, it is in virtue of his name, as a crucified Saviour. If we baptize in his name, it is that you may be *elect, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ.*<sup>26</sup> When we invite you to his holy table, it is, that you may spiritually partake of Christ crucified; and have your faith in him strengthened by those convincing words, *This is my blood which is shed for you, and for many, for the remission of sins.*

It is thus, that in all the ordinances and ministrations of our holy religion, by which the Christian is instructed, strengthened, and comforted in his passage through the vale of tears, Christ crucified is made to him *the power of*

<sup>26</sup> 1 Pet. i. 2.



*God, and the wisdom of God.* And when his race is run, and that moment, so dismal and hopeless to the unbeliever, is at hand, when he must pass into the world of spirits; when the legal confidence of the formalist, and the unsubstantial wisdom of the disputers of this world are crumbling into dust; religion still attends him, and bids the trembling soul look to the cross of Christ; not to that material representation of it, to which superstition attaches an imaginary efficacy; but to that lively portraiture of the crucified Redeemer, which has been graven by the energy of faith upon the fleshly tables of the heart; and soothes the pangs of departure with the only plea for mercy which can then be urged: "Lord, we humbly commend the soul of this thy servant into thy hands; beseeching thee that it may be precious in thy sight. Wash it, we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb, that was slain to take away the sins of the world; that whatsoever defilements it may have contracted in the midst of this miserable and naughty world being cleansed and done away, it may be presented pure and without spot before thee!"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Service for the Visitation of the Sick.

## SERMON XX.

RESURRECTION OF THE BODY.<sup>1</sup>

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1 COR. XV. 3.

*I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.*

THE three fundamental articles of Christian faith, that Christ died for our sins, that he rose again from the dead, and that he will come again to judgment, are spoken of by St. Paul, in this chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, under the title of "the Gospel." *I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory*

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Easter Day.

*what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* And this Gospel, the knowledge of these capital doctrines, the Apostle tells the Galatians, he had from the Lord Jesus himself: *I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*<sup>2</sup> No other argument is required, to prove the comparative importance of these points of Christian belief, than the simple fact, that they formed the leading features of that direct personal revelation, by which the great Apostle was at once initiated into the secrets of the great mystery of godliness, by him who was its author and object. The first thing he learned was, that Christ died for the sins of the world; the second, that, being buried, he rose again; from these truths followed the assurance of a judgment to come, and of the resurrection to eternal life.

Having, on a former occasion, considered the historical certainty of our Saviour's resurrection, the most important and the best attested miracle recorded in the annals of the world, I shall now take it for granted; and proceed to inquire into the nature of those benefits, which it ascertained and ratified to us. These may be classed under three heads, as they refer to the doctrine and

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 12.

example of Christ; to his power; or to the atoning efficacy of his death.

With respect to the doctrine; if it be true that Christ *hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,*<sup>a</sup> it is only by his resurrection that the truth of the Gospel itself is proved, and the certainty of a life after death placed beyond contradiction; for if Christ be not risen from the dead, then was the preaching of Apostles and the faith of martyrs vain. By his resurrection, he rekindled the extinguished hopes of his followers, recalled their faith, and established it for ever upon the rock of truth. He gave the most unquestionable proof of his Messiahship by the most surprising of his miracles; and established the certainty of a future resurrection by proving, in his own person, its possibility, and the truth of his promises. For this reason the miracle of the resurrection was looked upon, by the Apostles, as the key-stone of the whole fabric of the Gospel; that, which being withdrawn, the whole would crumble into ruins, and disappear from beneath their feet. This they urged, as the strongest argument of its truth, both to Jews and Gentiles; as the sure and certain ground of their own hopes, and as a

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. i. 10.

topic of mutual encouragement and consolation to their converts.

The chapter, from which the text is taken, is an argumentative declaration of the truth, that the resurrection of Jesus was a pledge and an example of our own; that if Christ were not risen from the dead, the Gospel, which St. Paul and his fellow-labourers had preached, was a system of deceit or of error, and that, too, without the prospect, or the possibility even, of present gain; for its rewards are all in futurity: *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* But that if he were indeed risen, as undoubtedly he was, a resurrection from the dead was possible; for as Christ had risen, so might Christians rise again. But his resurrection proved, not only the possibility, but the certainty of a general resurrection; of which, after what he had taught and asserted, it was to be regarded as the pledge and prelude. *Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept; or, as the same Apostle elsewhere reasons, If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 14.

The consolation, which this great scripture doctrine, as enforced and illustrated by St. Paul, is calculated to afford, has been experienced by many of us, at a moment, when all the resources of faith were required to sustain our fainting souls; the Church having directed it to be read, as a part of the solemn service with which she consigns the Christian to his last earthly resting place. How substantial a comfort did we feel, in the assurance given to us by the Holy Spirit, that the same beloved individual, whom we then committed to the ground, with prayers and tears, would, in due time, rise again in glory; and that the very tabernacle which then, deserted by the immortal spirit, was about to *dwell* in dust, should *awake*, at the calling of the Lord, and *sing* triumphant songs of jubilee, in that day when *the earth shall cast out the dead.*<sup>5</sup>

*But some man will say, How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?* It were as pertinent and reasonable to ask, How was the first human body created? what precise aggregate of particles, and of what kinds, was first informed with a living spirit? To this possible question the Apostle gives no direct reply, but shows its unreasonableness by a comparison,

<sup>5</sup> 1<sup>st</sup>. xxvi. 19.

from which he leaves his readers to infer, that as the grain which is sown in the earth is *not that body that shall be*, after it has germinated and sprung up, so the mortal body which is buried, is not precisely the same in substance with that which is to be raised at the last day ; but that God will change the one, as he changes the other. Yet the grain of wheat contains the germ of the future plant ; and the body that is to be raised, may be, as to some principle of identity, the same with that which is laid in the earth. St. Paul does not assert that one body is buried, and another is raised ; but that the body is sown in one state, and raised in another : *It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.* Jesus Christ, when he rose from the dead, took again his body, the very same body which had been laid in the sepulchre ; yet before he ascended into heaven, that body was glorified, and made a heavenly body ; and such will ours be at the general resurrection. As now we resemble Adam, in his fallen state, so then we shall resemble Christ : *as we have borne the image of the earthy, we must also bear the image of the heavenly. This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

This knowledge ought to be sufficient to satisfy our curiosity respecting the mode of a bodily resurrection. On such a subject we can have no knowledge but what we derive from revelation; and at this point revelation stops: *it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him.*<sup>6</sup> In the mean time let us be able to say, with St. Paul, *Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the working, whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself.*

Such are the doctrines established by our Saviour's resurrection. If it be asked whether, independently of that proof, they be in themselves probable, we answer, yes; they are not inconsistent with the analogy of nature. *There are celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial;* and as there is nothing, in the constitution of nature, which renders it improbable, so it cannot be pronounced impossible, that there may be an appointed mode, by which one shall pass into the other.<sup>7</sup> Many animals on earth are ex-

<sup>6</sup> 1 John iii. 2.

<sup>7</sup> This illustration is borrowed from Ogden's Sermons, p. 204.



amples of transition from one state of existence into another, so different, that no person, who had not watched the process, would suspect their identity in the two stages of their being.\* The organization, which fits them for life in one element, is exchanged for a structure, which can exist only in another. If the inferior orders of creation undergo these visible changes of being, there is nothing improbable in the notion, that man himself is destined to a change in his bodily frame, which may adapt it for a state of existence, of the nature of which he as yet knows nothing. Certainly God can change our bodies as easily as he made them, when they had no existence; and he has declared that he will do so: but he will do it by him, to whom he has given *all power in heaven and in earth.*†

And this leads us to consider, in the second place, the power of Christ in the resurrection. He, who has assured us of our resurrection to life, and attested it by his own, has claimed for himself the privilege of effecting it. He effected it in his own case; *Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might*

\* Strictly speaking, it may, perhaps, be questioned whether we ought to predicate *identity* of the insect, in its three stages of existence; but the *continuity* of being is such as to justify this use of the analogy.

† Matt. xxviii. 18.

*take it again. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*<sup>10</sup> And as for others, *As the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.*<sup>11</sup> A plain assertion of that omnipotence, which none but the Lord of life can claim. His will be the summons, which will awaken the dead from the slumber of the grave, collect the scattered particles of our mortal bodies, then to put on immortality; and re-invest the soul with a material frame, purified from all grosser parts and attributes: *The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*<sup>12</sup>

Since then it will be by the power, and at the word of Christ, that the grave will resign the dead of countless generations, to stand alive and embodied before his judgment seat, we may discern the force of that expression of St. Paul, *To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.*<sup>13</sup> And this word is full of

<sup>10</sup> John x. 17, 18.

<sup>12</sup> John v. 28, 29.

<sup>11</sup> John v. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Rom. xiv. 9.

consolation and hope to the faithful Christian ; since it enables him at the hour of his departure, while he commends his spirit into the hands of him who gave it, to contemplate without dismay the approaching dissolution of his earthly frame, knowing that although dead, it will be in the keeping of one who has promised, and is able to restore it, *in the times of restitution of all things*.<sup>14</sup> The destruction of death, and the exemption of his creatures from mortality, will be the last work to be accomplished by that Divine Person, who, in his character and office of Saviour, has received all authority and power from the Father, with whom he had eternally existed ; and in that character will retain it, till the object of his taking it shall be complete and perfect, and *death shall be swallowed up in victory*.

The dominion, with which Christ is now invested, as Messiah, over the world and its inhabitants, will terminate with the great act of judgment, which will for ever close the account of sin and death ; after which *he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power*.<sup>15</sup> The reign of grace, which

<sup>14</sup> Acts iii. 21.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 24.

Christ now exercises as our Lord, in right of redemption, will give place to the reign of glory; and his subjects will enter triumphantly, with their king, into his kingdom, which was before the earth or the worlds were made, and will continue for evermore.

What a sublime, and I may add, what a distinct and as it were tangible image does this scripture doctrine place before us, of the power and majesty of the Redeemer! What glorious anticipations of eternity does it open to the Christian! Hear how an Apostle combines the facts of the doctrine with the inference to be drawn from it: *The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout; with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, which are alive and remain, shall be caught up, together with them, in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort ye one another with these words.*<sup>10</sup>

We have now therefore established these two points: that Jesus Christ, by his own resurrection, assured us of our restoration to life and immortality; and that the work of raising us

<sup>10</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 16—18.

to life will be achieved by himself. He created us; he redeemed us; he sanctifies us by his Spirit; and he will raise us from the dead by the word of his power. The revelation of these truths, undiscoverable by human reason, makes it eminently true, that Jesus Christ not only *abolished death*, but *hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*. But the third, and not the least important, certainly the most truly evangelical truth, remains yet to be considered:—That the resurrection to life, its probability, its certainty, the means of its accomplishment, are all the effects and fruits of the death of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ had not died, and died for us, we could not have been raised again. Death was the penalty of sin: *By one man sin entered into the world; and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men. In Adam all die*. It was the perpetual memorial, as it was the perpetual penalty of original sin. And but for Christ it would have been eternal. The frame of man would have been finally and irretrievably destroyed. But Jesus undertook to suffer that penalty, in its severest shape as to bodily endurance; and, by the surpassing worthiness of his obedience, obtained a remission of

it, as to its duration, for all mankind. He did not abrogate the decree of mortality, but he deprived it of its sting. Death was still to attest the sinfulness of a fallen race, the common forfeit to be paid by all the posterity of Adam; but divested of its most terrific attribute by the sacrifice of Christ. The bodies of men were not wholly to perish, like those of the beasts of the field: but, after going through the process of mortality, to be restored to life; changed into a more glorious and enduring substance, fit receptacles for the immortal spirits of the just made perfect. This truth is enforced by St. Paul, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, where he institutes a parallel between Jesus Christ and Adam, and asserts, that through the sin of Adam all men are subject unto death; but the time will come when we shall no longer be subject to it, but be exempted from its necessity through the worthiness of Christ. *As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* The death of Christ is the meritorious cause of man's resurrection to life. He is the author of life, as Adam was of death.

Death therefore is no longer to be feared, as the commencement of an eternal sleep. The Christian soldier may say to the king of terrors,

I fear thee not ; take captive my body at thy will ; it shall not long be thine : triumph while thou mayst over the wreck of this temporary frame. Eternity is not thine, as once it seemed to be. Already hast thou lost one victim from thy grasp, who has *led captivity captive.*<sup>17</sup> The grave is no longer thy sure prison house, thy stronghold from which there is no escape : Jesus has burst its barriers, and will come again to call his own, and shall command thee to restore thy prey, and shall be obeyed. *If we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*<sup>18</sup> *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

But although Jesus Christ by his death has so far changed the penalty of sin, that, as he died for the sins of the whole world, so all mankind will participate in the resurrection, yet it will be the resurrection of life only to the pious and the good ; to the rest the resurrection of damnation. All shall enter by the same

<sup>17</sup> Although this expression may very properly be applied to our Saviour, as having led captive those who had before taken men captive at their will ; yet its true meaning is that which is given in the margin of our translation, "led a multitude of captives." The Hebrew idiom, by which a verbal substantive, used with its verb, increases the intensity of its signification, is too common to need illustration.

<sup>18</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 14.

great door into the judgment-hall of Christ; but there the final separation will be made; and *those on the left hand shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.*<sup>19</sup> It is not enough for us, to be assured that we shall rise again, unless we know that we shall rise with Christ; but those who are *his*, who have taken him for their only Saviour, and followed him as their only Master, have that assurance in his promises, his resurrection, and his ascension. His resurrection ratified and confirmed his promise of their admission into heaven, and his ascension exemplified its reality. Whither the head is gone, the members will follow. We have *a forerunner who is for us entered:*<sup>20</sup> visibly departed into that glory into which he has pledged himself to admit his faithful followers; *I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.*<sup>21</sup> When Thomas, not yet enlightened by the Spirit, said to him, *Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?* *Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.* We know

<sup>19</sup> Matt. xxv. 46.<sup>20</sup> Heb. vi. 20.<sup>21</sup> John xiv. 2.



then that it is possible to reach that glorious place, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; and we know the way, the only way. We know that it is possible; for our Lord and Master has said, *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:*<sup>22</sup> and we know the way, for he has said again, *I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved.*<sup>23</sup>

All this we know; because the Almighty has set to it the seal of everlasting truth, by first foretelling, and then accomplishing the resurrection of Jesus. The possession of this knowledge places the humblest disciple of Jesus, as to his motives and prospects as a moral agent, at an immeasurable elevation above the wisest and best of the masters of heathen philosophy. It is this which imparts to him, under the certainty of approaching dissolution, a sentiment of joyful anticipation, as different from the trembling doubt, or the determined apathy of the dying unbeliever, as the bright gleams of light, which herald the rising of the sun, are different from the fitful glare of the lightning, or the sullen darkness of a polar winter.

But these vivid prospects of future glory

<sup>22</sup> John xi. 25.

<sup>23</sup> John x. 9.

ought surely to obscure, and almost to obliterate those less sublime and holy views and motives, which actuate the children of this world, who live in and for this world, and have no clear discernment of another. He who, by a determined and affectionate reception of Christ, as his redeemer and teacher, has ascertained his own title to a share in the resurrection of the just, looks forward to that event with such a sure and steadfast hope, that he may be said already to have risen with Christ. But this ought to be the case with every one who professes to be his disciple. It is promised in baptism; it is implied when we name him as our Saviour; it is referred to in all our prayers. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.*<sup>24</sup> *Mortify your members which are upon the earth.*<sup>25</sup> Remembering that our bodies will one day be glorified and rendered fit to stand before God, let us be careful not to use them as the instruments of unholiness; but to *glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's,*<sup>26</sup> by a pious and reasonable use of both; that he may glorify both soul and body in the resurrection of the just.

<sup>24</sup> Coloss. iii. 1.<sup>25</sup> Coloss. iii. 5.<sup>26</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 20.

The doctrine of a bodily resurrection invests with somewhat of a tangible and practical character our notions of immortality. We have so little conception of the nature and operations of pure disembodied spirit, that our aspirations to the glories of a future state are apt to be checked by the indistinctness of our ideas, as to the manner in which we can hereafter become the objects of reward or punishment. Inquire into your own views on the subject, and see whether it be not almost impossible to divest yourselves of the opinion, that you are to be clothed upon with bodies, of whatever kind, in the life to come. The notion of a distinguishable identity seems requisite, in order to give substance and reality to those pleasing and consolatory hopes, which brighten the darkness of bereavement with the prospect of re-union, and mitigate the anguish of the parting hour with the thoughts of rejoining and recognizing, in the world of spirits, those who are gone before us to their reward. This is in fact the language of nature: it is also that of Scripture: it is one of the plainest revelations of Christianity. And if the curious, or the profane, should abuse this doctrine, by attempting to institute comparisons between our bodily habits and wants here in the flesh, and hereafter

in our glorified state, the Christian has a ready answer in the words of his Lord, *In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God in heaven.*<sup>27</sup>

These reflexions upon the great event, which is this day commemorated by the Church, are strictly practical. Whatever tends to give clearness and force to our notions of the various benefits which have been wrought for us by Christ our Saviour, tends, in the same degree, to give strength and liveliness to our faith, and to render more intense, and more heart-constraining, our motives to holiness. In fact, the resurrection of our Lord, as recorded by the Evangelists, and as explained and improved by the Apostles, has given a degree of distinctness and splendour to our prospects of the eternal world, which leaves us without excuse, if we continue to live as though we had *hope in this life only*. Christ is risen, and ascended into heaven; and his church no longer enjoys his bodily presence. But the faithful Christian, while he looks forward to his participation of that joy, with the *lively hope* to which he has been *begotten by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

<sup>27</sup> Matt. xxii. 30.

*from the dead;*<sup>28</sup> anxiously strengthens his faith and confirms his hope, by all the aids and means vouchsafed to those who are in covenant with God; by deep meditation on the precious promises of his Word; by constant fervent prayer to the Father, through him who died and is risen again; by frequent communion at that holy table, where the Lord is to be found by the faithful until his coming again: *whom, having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*<sup>29</sup> Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.<sup>30</sup> We have the promise of being made like to him hereafter, if, being justified by faith in his blood, we strive, by the help of his Holy Spirit, to resemble him here. No argument can be more conclusive, no motive more touching than this, both to hope and to holiness; *Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Rom. iv. 25.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8.

<sup>31</sup> 1 John iii. 2.

# SERMON XXI.

ATHANASIAN CREED.<sup>1</sup>

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MATT. XXVIII. 19.

*Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*

THIS being one of the days, upon which the Church requires from us an explicit and particular confession of our belief in the great Christian doctrine of Three Persons in one God, it is my intention to offer some remarks upon the Creed in which we are directed to make that confession; and I have therefore taken for my text, the shortest and most emphatic of the Scripture sentences which assert, or imply, a three-fold manifestation of the Deity in the

<sup>1</sup> Preached on Trinity Sunday.

economy of redemption. They are the words of the incarnate Son himself. He who had declared, *I and my Father are one; All things that the Father hath are mine;*<sup>2</sup> *What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise;*<sup>3</sup> who had promised that both the Father and himself would send to his disciples a Comforter, even the Spirit of Truth, an abiding and a sanctifying Spirit; did, upon laying down the functions of his earthly ministry, distinctly announce, and, as it were, embody in a sacramental symbol, that wonderful truth, of which he had before asserted the separate features, the equality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

From the age of those Apostles, to whom the baptismal commission was thus given, down to the present times, the Christian Church has required of those, who have been brought for admission into the family of Christ, a distinct profession of belief in the same great mystery of godliness, that in the unity of the Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.<sup>4</sup> And it is a part of the discipline of

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 15.

<sup>3</sup> John v. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See Lord King's History of the Apostles' Creed, p. 37.

that Church, that all its members should, in the presence of one another, and of Him who is the object of belief and adoration, repeat, at stated times, their profession of a true Christian faith; to the end that they may never lose sight of those important doctrines, which have been, from the first, considered to be the fundamental and cardinal doctrines of their religion; nor consider Christian belief as having no connexion with, nor influence over, Christian practice.

The seat of true belief is in the heart: having descended thither through the instrumentality of reason, it is embraced and cherished by the affections, watered by the dews of the Spirit, and made to bring forth the fruit of godly wishes and actions. But for the edification and prosperity of Christ's Church upon earth, the believer is required, in his corporate capacity as a Christian, to make, and to renew, a public and solemn declaration of allegiance to his Saviour; of implicit faith in the doctrines which he has revealed, as well as of obedience to the precepts which he has enjoined upon us: *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*<sup>5</sup>

In what terms, then, shall this confession of

<sup>5</sup> Rom. x. 10.



faith be made? The single authentic code of belief and practice to a Christian is the written Word of God. And our own Church instructs us, that "Whatsoever is not contained therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation."<sup>6</sup> But while the Scriptures remain, like their divine object and author, *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever*; mankind, for whom they are intended, are of different capacities and inclinations; and, unless there be a special interposition of the Holy Spirit in every individual case, the Scriptures will not be understood with the same facility, nor convey precisely the same impressions to the minds of all who hear or read them. The Word of God, which is good and perfect in itself, is to be used and applied by those, who are themselves very far removed from goodness and perfection. It is *sharper than any two-edged sword*, a weapon of heavenly temper, and matchless force; but to be wielded by the arm of human infirmity. In reading the Scriptures, as in every other exercise of reason, mankind are liable to all the disadvantages of a frail and fallible nature; but,

<sup>6</sup> Art. VI.

on the other hand, they possess all the advantages of mutual instruction ; and although some parts of Holy Writ be dark and mysterious, yet in the main, they are so plain and explicit, that it is not difficult to discover their true sense, if we will but abide by the common and established rules of interpretation.

When I say that the Scriptures are plain and explicit, I mean that they are plain and explicit in *declaring* the facts and truths of revelation, not in *explaining* the essence or the mode of those truths. In attempting to elicit, from the Word of God, that information which it was not intended to convey, reason deserted her legitimate province ; opened a door to all the evils which flow from human infirmity, and prejudice, and passion ; and led presumptuous inquirers into the nature of divine truths, by degrees to question their reality. Even before the Apostles had completed their earthly labours, there were professors of that Gospel, which had scarcely begun to flow from the fountain-head, who had been carried on, by some such process as this, to deny some of the doctrines which lie on the very surface of God's Word ; and to make it doubtful, to humble, unlearned seekers after truth, what was necessary to be believed.

It became, then, a natural and requisite precaution, on the part of those to whom more especially was committed the preservation of the faith once delivered to the saints, to enumerate, in the clearest and shortest form of words, the leading articles of the Christian religion, and to say to their flock, This is what you are required to believe. These things are clearly declared in the Scriptures, the only sure rule of our opinions concerning God ; his attributes, his will, and the measures of his providence. This form of sound words we deliver to you, not to supersede the use of that sacred volume, in which these doctrines are declared ; but as a guide, in the first instance, to your reason, and afterwards to your memory ; and as a form of public confession, in which all may join, without fear of deviating from the straight line of Scripture truth.

One of the most ancient of these Confessions, or Creeds, that is to say, declarations of belief, is that which is termed the Apostles' Creed : not as being indeed the composition of those holy men ; but because the profession of all its leading articles may be traced up to their time.

But why, it may be asked, were not the simplest forms of confession retained in the Church,

in preference to the more elaborate and intricate creeds which are afterwards introduced ?

The advantage of comprising, in a certain form of words, a summary of Christian doctrine, both for the guidance of individuals, and the edification of the Church, has been already pointed out. But there was this disadvantage ; that these precise declarations afforded to various heretics so many distinct points, upon which they might fasten their objections. This imposed, or was thought to impose, upon the defenders of the true faith, the necessity of enlarging their creeds, and of inserting, from time to time, fresh additions, in order to obviate fresh objections. As new errors arose in the Church of Christ, (and there was an early and plentiful crop of them,) fresh assertions of the truth were thought to be required. When a doctrine, heretofore undisputed, was for the first time publicly denied, it became expedient that the Church, as the depositary and appointed guardian of the truth, should with authority assert it. Thus, in the earlier creeds, it was enough to declare a belief in God, and in Jesus Christ his only Son. But because some persons denied that Jesus Christ existed before his incarnation, or before the creation of the world, it was asserted in the

Nicene Creed, the first part of which was drawn up about 300 years after our Saviour's death, that he was begotten of the Father (the expression used by our Lord himself) before all worlds; and not made, as a creature is made. In short, the Nicene Creed is nothing more than those simpler forms, from which the Apostles' Creed was compiled, enlarged, enforced, and explained, in opposition to the Arian heresy, which was then springing up in the Church.<sup>7</sup>

When, however, I use the word *explained*, I do not intend to say, that the framers of the Creed pretended to explain the *nature* of all those doctrines which they declared to be contained in Scripture. They were well aware, that the nature and attributes of God are to be known and understood, only as he has himself revealed them to us. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*<sup>8</sup> But it happens, that the very declaration of Scripture truth, when it is endeavoured to make it categorical and explicit, assumes the appearance of

<sup>7</sup> "When any article was added to the Creed, it was not the introduction of a new point, but the vindicating and settling of an old one."—*Lord King*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> Rom. xi. 33.

an attempt at explanation. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are each spoken of in Scripture as God. Each is distinctly invested, in that infallible canon of truth, with the incommunicable attributes of Deity. Yet the fundamental doctrine of true religion is this, *The Lord our God is one Lord.*<sup>9</sup> *The Lord he is God; there is none else beside him.*<sup>10</sup> The Word of God must be true, and cannot contradict itself. We are driven then to this conclusion, that in the unity of the Godhead there are three subsistences, or persons; a term which we are compelled to use, as being the most expressive of our very inadequate idea of this manifestation, or exertion of the Divine Essence. And this phrase, although it is merely a comprehensive mode of expressing what the Scriptures declare at large, wears the semblance of explaining that, which in fact does not admit of explanation.

If it be said, that what cannot be explained, cannot be understood, we reply, that certainly no man, who has ever considered the subject and end of a divine revelation, will hold that to be an insuperable, or even an important objection. We cannot pretend to assert, that all

<sup>9</sup> Deut. vi. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Deut. iv. 35.

truths are intelligible to us ; nor to deny that some truths *may* have been propounded to us as objects of belief, which it is not intended that we should comprehend, as to their essence; which probably it would not be possible for us to comprehend, in this imperfect state of being, where nothing is known, but in part. Such truths, if we find them asserted in the Word of God, it would be as absurd and unreasonable to deny, because we cannot understand *how* they can be, as it would be to deny those phenomena of the natural world, of the reality of which our senses assure us, but the cause and the mode of which our reason is altogether unable to conjecture. But when doctrines so contained in Scripture, and embraced, with a comfortable persuasion of their certainty, by the meek and teachable mind, are by others disputed and derided, it may become necessary to define and enforce them, with as much accuracy and precision, as human language, applied to such subjects, will admit of.

On this principle was composed what is commonly called the Creed of Athanasius ; not the production of that celebrated father, but probably called by his name, as exhibiting a compendium of the doctrines which he so strenuously maintained. It is, in fact, neither more nor less

than an explicit and minute contradiction of several erroneous opinions, which had been propagated in the Christian world. It is the doctrine of the Nicene Creed spread over a wider surface, and asserted in a greater variety of definitions, because the subtilty of false teachers had multiplied contradictory opinions respecting the divine nature. It does not assert that the union of three persons, or subsistences, in the Godhead, is a doctrine relating to a comprehensible truth; but a *true* doctrine, because it is a Scripture doctrine. God is represented in his Word, as subsisting in three persons; as having made a three-fold manifestation of himself, as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; yet that these three, as to the essence of the Deity, are one; and that therefore the incommunicable attributes of divinity equally belong to all, for the Godhead of the three is all one: all uncreate, and incomprehensible, that is, not to be comprehended or limited by space; all eternal, and almighty; all spoken of in Scripture as God and Lord; and yet not three Gods, nor three Lords, but one God and one Lord. What, then, is the difference between them?

Our blessed Saviour described himself as the only-begotten Son. The Holy Ghost is spoken



of in Scripture as the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ ; as being sent from the Father and the Son. The Creed therefore asserts, that the Son is not created, but begotten, in such sense as Jesus Christ himself intended, when he used the term ; and that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son ;<sup>11</sup> that they are equal and co-eternal, none being before or after other, in point of time, nor greater or less than another : this being essential to the unity of the Godhead. To express this threefold subsistence of the Deity, the word *Trinity* has been adopted ; and the objection, which some ignorant persons have made, that because the word *Trinity* does not occur in Scripture, the doctrine of the *Trinity* cannot be a Scripture doctrine, is as reasonable as it would be to argue, that because the word *omnipresent* is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of God's omnipresence is false ; a fact of which we are perfectly assured, although the mode of it utterly surpasses our comprehension.

The Creed then declares it to be necessary to everlasting salvation, that we believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ ; that

<sup>11</sup> See the Extract from Archbishop Wake's Catechism, printed at the end of my Lectures on St. John's Gospel.

he is God and man ; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before all worlds ; man, of the substance of his mother, born *in* the world : not, as some early heretics taught, a phantom ; but of reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting : not two persons, as another sect pretended, but one Christ ; not by changing the divine nature into the human, but by taking the nature of man upon him. And this we must believe rightly. *Whosoever, says St. John, confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, (an expression which necessarily implies his existence before he came in the flesh,) is a deceiver and an antichrist.*<sup>12</sup>

Thus, then, as to doctrine, the Athanasian Creed asserts nothing but what is implied in the Apostles' Creed : but because the general expressions of the latter had been perverted and evaded, this more explicit formulary was adopted by the Church, as a distinct and unequivocal profession of that, which was held to be the true Catholic faith ; nor does it contain, as far as its doctrine is concerned, a single assertion which can be objected to as erroneous, by any believer in the divinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The most serious objection to this Creed

<sup>12</sup> 2 John vii.

is its apparent uncharitableness, in excluding from salvation those who do not believe what it affirms. Now, with regard to Christian belief in general, we may assert, without fear of contradiction, that whatsoever God proposes for our belief in his Word, must be believed; for otherwise his veracity is impeached, and our faith is imperfect. He has imparted to us a revelation of his will and counsels, and requires our attention to it, as the only rule of our faith and practice. Whatsoever he therein requires and enjoins, we must do, with a ready and cheerful obedience; and whatsoever he declares, we must believe with humility and meekness. And if it be once ascertained, that any doctrine concerning himself is contained and asserted in his Word, who will presume to say that the belief of that doctrine is not necessary to salvation?

If men are accountable to God for their faith, as well as their practice, it is a necessary consequence that a man must believe rightly in order to salvation. This is the general proposition, which we may lay down broadly. It is limited and qualified by him who searcheth the hearts, and can alone judge of every man's opportunities and means of believing and doing what he requires. The exercise of this prerogative of

God's omniscience and goodness is taken for granted through all the formularies of a protestant Church, whose language is, This is what we believe to be the true Christian faith; which, if it be so, must be embraced by all who desire to be saved. Nevertheless we believe it, only because we think that we so read in the Word of God; for "that which is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not a necessary article of faith."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth to us in Holy Scripture;<sup>14</sup> and although the Church be a witness and keeper of Holy Writ, yet, as it ought not to decree any thing *against* the same, so *besides* the same ought it not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of salvation."<sup>15</sup> This is the language which our Church holds in her Articles; and I consider it to be evident, that a Church, which holds such language, can never intend to pronounce unqualified sentence of condemnation (or rather to declare that sentence will be given) upon those, who do not implicitly receive these minuter explanations and illustrations of a doctrine, which she herself has laid down as fully and particularly as is necessary in her first five Articles.

<sup>13</sup> Art. VI.<sup>14</sup> Art. XVII.<sup>15</sup> Art. XX.

Nevertheless, it is certain, that whatever the true faith is, it is necessary to salvation, as far as *we* can determine. If this be denied, a Christian's belief becomes a matter of no importance. If therefore the Christian faith be rightly set forth in the Athanasian Creed, the Church is justified in saying, that the belief of the doctrines therein contained is necessary to salvation; provided that this be said with those implied limitations, with which all such declarations must be fenced and qualified. Suppose that after a recital of the two great commandments, or a collection of evangelical precepts, the Church were to declare, "This is the true Christian practice, which except a man perform faithfully, he cannot be saved;" who would be offended at the declaration? Yet even there, it could not be intended to exclude, but rather to take for granted, the merciful allowances which God will make for natural weakness and inability, and the necessity of repentance and faith.<sup>16</sup> We have reason to think that some wilful errors in belief, as well as wilful defects of practice, may exclude a man from salvation: but we do not presume to limit the goodness of God; nor to pronounce, of any unintentional error, or any sin of infirmity,

<sup>16</sup> See Waterland on the Athan. Creed, Vol. IV. p. 299.

that it is beyond the reach of his mercy. At the same time, if we know how to estimate the preciousness of that hope, which has been solely and exclusively purchased for us by the death of the incarnate Son; if we value, as they deserve, the sanctifying influences of that Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; we cannot hesitate to declare our belief, (and we shall do so, not from an uncharitable conceit, but under a sorrowful conviction) that he, who *hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counteth the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing,*<sup>17</sup> is in great danger of perishing everlastingly. With its condemning clauses, as they are called, thus modestly expounded, the Athanasian Creed was declared, by the scrupulous and pious Baxter, to be the best explication of the doctrine of the Trinity;<sup>18</sup> that is to say, an explanation, not of the nature of the Trinity itself, but of the doctrine contained in holy Scripture.

In this age of what is called a freedom of opinion, how many Christians are there, who, when they have once departed from the primitive rule of faith preserved in the formularies of our Church, shift continually from one set of

<sup>17</sup> Heb. x. 29.

<sup>18</sup> See Waterland, p. 307, note.

opinions to another, and are carried about by every wind of doctrine; till some make shipwreck of their faith upon the quicksands of deism, while others lose themselves in the gulph of antinomian wickedness. This is not an age, in which we can hastily consent to relinquish, or remove, any of those standards and boundary marks of the faith, by which the scriptural character of our Church is defined and ascertained; and which, when carefully and candidly examined, are found not to be inconsistent with the moderation and charity by which an evangelical Church will always be distinguished.

But let us bear in mind, that the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity, mysterious as it is, may and ought to be made, in the highest sense of the term, a practical doctrine. The abstract notion of Deity is, in a manner, fixed, and realized, and brought home to the affections of mankind. Is it not an unspeakable enhancement of the gratitude, which is due to the divine author of our redemption, that he effected it, in our nature? that *we have heard, have seen with our eyes, have looked upon, and with our hands have handled the Word of life*?<sup>19</sup> that the fulness of the Godhead bodily dwelt in

<sup>19</sup> 1 John i. 1.

*Him* who dwelt among *us*? that we have, as it were, a substantial object of our love of God, in the person of his Incarnate Son? and that he himself, in those holy sacraments, one of which is intended to remind us of three persons in one God, accomplishing the work of our redemption, and the other, that *the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*, has embodied the most wonderful and consolatory doctrines of his religion in visible signs and symbols? And is there not inexpressible consolation in the thought of that direct personal agency, which is carried on by the Holy Spirit in this work of our salvation; in the reflexion, that he dwells in us, and watches over us, and suggests pious thoughts and holy wishes; and pours refreshment into the soul when it is weary, and awakens it when it is dull, and *helpeth our infirmities, making intercessions for us with groanings that cannot be uttered*?<sup>20</sup> Let us be contented to know God, as he has been pleased to reveal himself to us, *God manifest in the flesh; justified in the Spirit*;<sup>21</sup> and consider the special and particular motives to love and obedience which he has given us in his person of Creator, of Redeemer, and of Sanctifier;

<sup>20</sup> Rom. viii. 26.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 16.



always bearing in mind that vital doctrine and grand purpose of the Gospel, which it must be our daily prayer and endeavour to realize in our own persons; that the *blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, may purge our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Heb. ix. 14.

# SERMON XXII.

A FAREWELL SERMON.<sup>1</sup>

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I THESS. XI. 11.

*Ye know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.*

AMONGST the peculiarities which honourably distinguish the Christian religion from all that had subsisted before it, and which are amongst the marks and evidences of its divine origin, is the institution of a ministry; the separation of a body of men, not indeed as intercessors, to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, but to be

<sup>1</sup> Preached in the Church of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, Oct. 19, 1828, when a collection was made in aid of the Incorporated Society for promoting the Building and Enlargement of Churches and Chapels.

their guides and teachers and examples, in things pertaining unto God. To some such institution, however deficient in authority and efficacy, the spiritual necessities of mankind would naturally have conducted them, under the Gospel revelation; but the divine wisdom made a complete and authoritative provision for those necessities, from the very first, by a direct appointment.

Without the public solemnities of devotion, private and individual piety would quickly languish, and by degrees expire. The lamp of religion must be trimmed and replenished by all the aids of human diligence and zeal, as well as by the infusion of spiritual energy from above. Without the former it would yield but a glimmering and uncertain light, amidst the darkness of a corrupt and careless world: devoid of the latter, it would emit only the fearful glare of superstition, or the fitful and delusive flashes of enthusiasm.

It is therefore one of the great mercies of God, in the Gospel dispensation, that by his blessed Son he founded a visible Church in the world; *a city set on a hill, that cannot be hid*;<sup>2</sup> a memorial to mankind of the importance and authority of religion; the depositary and dispenser

<sup>2</sup> Matt. v. 14.

of the written Word ; an institution of perpetual duration, as to its essential elements and principles, like its divine Founder, *the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever* ; although admitting of modification, as to its outward aspect and its formal economy, according to the exigencies of those, for whose benefit it is designed.

The most important feature of this provision for the maintenance and propagation of Gospel truth, is the appointment of an order of men, to preach the Word of God, to administer his sacraments, to be devoted to the spiritual welfare of their brethren ; to set good and evil before the people ; to stand at the gates of the sanctuary, and invite all men to enter in, and *taste the good Word of God* ;<sup>3</sup> to admonish the careless, to advise the doubtful, to rebuke the ungodly, to comfort the afflicted ; in a word, *to do the work of an evangelist*,<sup>4</sup> for which the Lord Jesus himself came upon earth.

The division of mankind, considered as religious beings, into two classes, those who teach, and those who are to learn, would have been a necessary result of their moral constitution and circumstances, had it not been appointed by God himself. The natural inequality of talent, and

<sup>3</sup> Heb. vi. 5.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 5.

the accidental disparity of their outward advantages and opportunities, which in every other science, and even in questions affecting their personal rights, make the great bulk of mankind willing to be instructed, guided, and governed by a few; would dispose them to a like submission and subordination, in the pursuit or reception of religious knowledge; and the more readily, inasmuch as it is an object of inquiry, unconnected with secular advantages, and with present rewards.

In fact, this last consideration makes pure religion to be an object of so little interest to man, in his unrenewed state, that it would not long continue to subsist in any community, were there not an express provision for its maintenance and preservation. And it is not easy to conceive any provision, which shall so effectually answer this end, as the separation and dedication of a particular class of men, to be the religious instructors of their brethren, and to minister before them, in those public rites and offices of worship, which are indispensable to the maintenance of religion; to be the *lights of the world*; *the salt of the earth*; the ambassadors of divine mercy to a sinful and careless generation; watchmen, to awaken mankind from the sleep of sin;

stewards of the word of God, and dispensers of his sacraments.

With respect to the Christian religion, the evidences upon which it claims our belief and obedience, and the records which contain its doctrines and precepts, are of such a nature, as to demand inquiries, for which the greater part of mankind are of necessity but little qualified : and for the results of these inquiries they must rely upon the concurrent testimony of others, who have had leisure, and opportunity, and ability to prosecute them with effect ; or, at least, who are appointed, by competent judges, to deliver to them the truths which such inquiries have established, and the knowledge of which is essential to their eternal interests. The people at large must therefore know, to whom they are to look for instruction, in questions of such vital importance : and from these simple premises is inferred the necessity of a standing ministry.

Not only in the doctrines of the Gospel, not only in its precepts and consolations, has the divine wisdom consulted the actual constitution and wants of those for whom it was designed ; but also in the provision made for its continuance and preservation. That, which would in any case have been necessary, or highly expedient for man,

as a religious being, the object of a divine revelation, has been rendered obligatory and authoritative, by the positive appointment of Jesus Christ, made through those chosen messengers, whom he invested with plenary authority to build his Church, and to provide for its perpetuity. I say nothing here of our more special and holy designation, as administrators of those distinguishing ordinances of our religion, by which the grace of God, purchased for us by his blessed Son, is conveyed to his people; being willing, for the present, to rest the authority of the Christian ministry upon the appointment of Jesus Christ through his Apostles, ratifying and confirming that provision for the spiritual wants of his people, to which the wants themselves would naturally have conducted them; the separation and constitution of an order of men, to declare to mankind the laws and counsels of God, and to lead them in the performance of the public offices of piety.

But although such an institution is both natural and necessary, and has been, under some modification or other, a feature of almost every religion, yet the Christian ministry is distinguished by characters peculiar to itself, and strongly indicative of divine benevolence and wisdom. The religions of the heathen world had no office

corresponding to that of a minister of the Gospel; no, nor even the chosen people of God under the old covenant. They had, it is true, a holy priesthood, to offer sacrifices for sins; but their office related principally to outward forms and ceremonies, the *shadow of good things to come*.<sup>5</sup> Holy men, also, were, from time to time, raised up, to denounce the vengeance of Jehovah against idolatry and disobedience, and to foretell the future destinies of Israel. But there was no stated practical exposition of the Word of God; no course of divine instruction; no friendly admonition; no watching over souls, as a charge to be accounted for to God. This was a peculiar feature of the Christian polity; and bears the stamp of that consummate wisdom, and exceeding goodness of God, which knew the wants and weaknesses of human nature, and made ample provision for them, in the final dispensation of his mercy.

In the next place, let me say a few words as to the ministerial authority with which we are invested. It is held by some Christians, that to the right ordination of a minister nothing is requisite, but his election by a certain congregation, and a formal declaration of their choice,

<sup>5</sup> Heb. x. 1.



accompanied by prayer. Now if the choice of their minister by a congregation be ordination ; then, if a majority of his hearers be displeased with their teacher, they can unordain him ; and he will have no resource but to be reordained by another congregation, and to be more pliable to their judgment, or caprice. The mischiefs, which are likely to result to the cause of truth, from an elective ministry, from a dependence of the teacher upon those whom he has to teach, are of themselves an unanswerable argument in favour of that form of church government, which does not leave the choice of guides to those who are to be led by them ; but entrusts it, under an awful responsibility, to those, who have been appointed in succession from the Apostles themselves, to provide for the Church a supply of fit and able ministers, and to take care, as they value their own peace of mind, that none enter into the sacred office, who are not qualified for the performance of its duties. Such a power is no where given by Christ and his Apostles, even by inference, to magistrates or people ; but has been exercised by the pastors of his Church ever since its foundation, in every part of the world.

We are entitled, then, my brethren, on the ground of our regular ordination to the ministry,

to speak to the Lord's household, as those who *are set over them, to give them their portion of meat in due season*; and to claim your attention, as a body of men, set apart from the people, in conformity with the intentions of our Saviour, and the directions of his Apostles, to lay before you the doctrines of salvation; to declare unto you the whole counsel of God; to *feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood*. And with whatever degree of ability we discharge our functions, if we do it with sincerity and earnestness, we have a right to expect a serious and candid audience. *We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God.*

But I am fully aware, that we may urge this solemn intreaty in vain, if we urge it solely upon the *authority* of our office, without making the whole of our preaching and living conformable with the character to which we pretend. I am aware, that if there be not a conviction, in the minds of our hearers, that we are, in the first place, qualified to discern the truth, and, in the second place, earnest and serious in setting it forth, our ministry will not be an effectual, a profitable, a fruitful ministry. In order thereto, it is requisite that we be

competently learned. With respect to the first preachers of the Gospel, the absence of human learning rendered more conspicuous and unquestionable the miraculous interposition of the Holy Spirit, by which they were enabled to confound the most acute, to baffle the most learned, to silence the most eloquent of their opponents. It was manifest that God had *chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which were mighty.*<sup>6</sup> The absence of human endowments gave scope for the free and full manifestation of the Spirit in its miraculous energies: but the ordinary gifts of the Spirit are to be expected, only in proportion to our pious and humble diligence in cultivating the natural faculties of our mind, with a view to the sacred work in which they are to be engaged.

Whatsoever branches of knowledge may be supposed to lie within the circle, which a learned minister of the Word has traversed and explored, there is one to which the humblest must aspire: he must strive to be *mighty in the Scriptures*. And what is it, to be mighty in the Scriptures? Not merely to repeat verse upon verse, or chapter upon chapter, of the Bible; but to have well

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. i. 27.

considered and weighed the meaning and coherence of the different parts of Holy Writ ; to have sought, by study and prayer, for a right understanding of their intent and application ; and to be able to press them upon the minds and consciences of others, with a convincing clearness and justness of reasoning ; without any of those forced and unauthorized appropriations, those mystical and unprofitable speculations, which perplex the weak, and offend the strong ; but with an earnestness of application to every man's reason and feeling, which does indeed make the learned and discreet minister mighty in the Scriptures ; for it enables him to throw down the strongholds of prejudice, and pride, and worldly-mindedness, in the hearts of his hearers ; to force open a door for grace, and so to wield *the sword of the Spirit*, as to give sensible demonstration of the truth, that the Word of God, when rightly applied, *is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.*<sup>1</sup>

But then it must be the *whole* counsel of God which we thus recommend and enforce, as delivered in his Word ; not some of its features, to the neglect or disparagement of the rest. We

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 12.

are not merely to convince men of their own sinfulness; but to persuade them of the free mercy of God. If we teach them the certain but mysterious doctrine, that he has foreknown all things from eternity, the salvation of the faithful, the condemnation of the ungodly; and that what he foreknows, he must have fore-ordained; we shall but foster a dangerous assurance in the presumptuous, and drive to despair the timid and the tender heart, unless we go on to convince them, that in the revelation of his will and purposes, as well as by that interpreter which he has planted within us, God deals with all men as with free agents, at liberty to choose the good or the evil, and answerable for the choice; able to come unto him through Christ, by the aid of his Spirit; and to *work out their salvation, albeit with fear and trembling.*<sup>8</sup>

But the theme of our preaching, the basis of our arguments, the ornament of our eloquence, must be Christ; Christ crucified. We tell you that you may come to God; but it must be through Christ; that you may obey him, and please him, but only in Christ; that he has promised to abide in you, but only as you abide

<sup>8</sup> Phil. ii. 12.

in Christ; that you may perform works which are good and acceptable to him; but good, only as they are the fruits and tokens of faith in Christ; and acceptable, only as Christ has purchased their acceptance by the infinite merits of his own obedience and death. I do not advise you to usurp the office of judge, over those whom you are commanded to honour and obey; nor ought you to be offended with the peculiarities of those preachers of the Gospel, whose mode of instruction may be unsuited to your judgment or your taste: but I cannot desire you to resign yourselves to the guidance of those who do not preach Christ, and him crucified. Let no man deprive you of that sure and certain anchor of the soul, that sole foundation of your hopes, as a responsible sinful being, that only real source of strength in this life, and of hope in another. What is the language of the great Apostle? *I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.<sup>9</sup> We preach Christ crucified.<sup>10</sup> I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>11</sup> In the sight of God speak we in Christ.<sup>12</sup> We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord,*

<sup>9</sup> Rom. i. 16.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. i. 23.

<sup>12</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 17.

*and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.<sup>13</sup> Christ in you the hope of glory, whom we preach.<sup>14</sup>*

It is the consideration of Christ crucified, the thought of what he has suffered, and of the object for which he suffered it, which alone can give seriousness and earnestness to a preacher of the Gospel, and which constitutes the sacredness and the dearness of that spiritual relationship, which binds a faithful pastor to his flock. What a constraining, what an overpowering motive have we to watchfulness and diligence in the duties of our holy calling, in the consideration, that *the Church of God*, which we are appointed to feed, *he purchased with his own blood.*<sup>15</sup> The redemption, for which he paid so dear a price, is offered freely to all men. All are called into his fold, out of a wicked world. *It is not the will of my Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*<sup>16</sup> It is our province and duty to repeat and enforce the call; to urge and persuade you, by every argument and motive—by reason, by intreaty, by rebuke, by encouragement, by example—to make a personal application

<sup>13</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Acts xx. 28.

<sup>14</sup> Col. i. 27.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. xviii. 14.

to yourselves of the benefits of redemption: *as ambassadors for Christ, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*<sup>17</sup> If by reason of our ignorance, or apathy, or negligence, one soul be lost, of those whom Jesus died to save, have we not the sinfulness of our fault, and the fearfulness of its punishment already recorded in the sentence of the eternal judge? *Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.*<sup>18</sup>

Under a sense of that awful truth, my brethren, although I have laboured amongst you and watched over you, with an anxiety and affection, which nothing could have inspired but the thought, that the people committed to my charge were the sheep of Christ "which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood;"<sup>19</sup> I have oftentimes been overwhelmed with apprehension, lest by my carelessness, or error, the salvation of any should have been placed in jeopardy, and a soul lost to its Saviour! Would that I could with confidence speak to you in the language of St. Paul; *I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the*

<sup>17</sup> 2 Cor. v. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. xviii. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ordination Service.



*blood of all men ; as I can truly say, with reference to my intentions and designs, I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Ye know, from the first day that I came among you, how I have kept back nothing that was profitable to you, but have showed, and taught you ; testifying repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>20</sup> and how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.<sup>21</sup>*

And this brings me to consider, in few words, the encouragement which we have, to a zealous perseverance in the duties of our ministry ; not only the encouragement, which every faithful servant of the Lord derives, from the consciousness that he is working the works of him that sent him ; but that which flows from a belief, that we are really instrumental in saving the souls of them that hear us ; that our preaching and example are, by the blessing of God, effectual to the great ends of the Christian ministry. This is the joy of which the Apostle speaks, as the exceeding present recompense of faithful pastors ; *Obey them that have the rule over you, and*

<sup>20</sup> Acts xx. 20, 26.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 11.

*submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy and not with grief.*<sup>22</sup> And to the Thessalonians, *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.*<sup>23</sup> May I not, without boasting, apply these words, in a qualified sense, to you, my Christian friends? May I not speak, without incurring the reproach of self-commendation, of the comfort and encouragement which I have found, in perceiving that my labours have not been altogether in vain? May I not *thank God, without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe?*<sup>24</sup> that it has not returned altogether void? that my instructions have been in some degree blessed, by him who alone can give the increase, to the growth of faith and charity, amongst those of whom it might truly be said, with reference to their appointed shepherd, *the sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name; and leadeth them out, and goeth before them;*

<sup>22</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.<sup>23</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 19.<sup>24</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 13.

*and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice ?*<sup>25</sup>

Let me enumerate the fruits, which may be expected from scriptural preaching and example; and then let us inquire of ourselves, (for it is an awful question to you and to me) whether such has been the guidance which you have followed, and to what degree you have followed it. Has my preaching been such, as not only to please your imagination, and to excite your feelings, and to produce a transient impression of piety; but has it led you to seek for the effectual grace of God, to make you real, practical, consistent Christians? The gradual improvement of your religious character; the progressive enlargement of your spiritual views; increased frequency and earnestness in prayer; a more intimate acquaintance with the Word of God; perceptible growth in grace; a more exemplary abstinence from the world; a more decidedly Christian conversation; a more disinterested and unwearied charity: these are enduring fruits of a faithful and laborious ministry; enduring themselves in time, and by their results in eternity. May the Lord grant, my Christian friends, that such may not only be

<sup>25</sup> John x. 3

the fruits of our ministry amongst you ; but that such also may be the reward of those who will henceforward carry on, with equal zeal and affection, the work which is now transferred to them, under the most solemn obligations to faithfulness !

May he bless the labours of *all* his servants, in such direction and degree as shall seem best to him ; and convert, in his own good time, those sinners, whom we have failed to convince ; and make free course for his Word, through hearts which now seem to be harder than the rock ! In due time we know that this will be brought to pass. What Christ has promised, he will make good. What he has begun and carried on by the ministry of his Church, he will also finish. We rely, with undoubting confidence, upon him, to accomplish the work, to which the best and the ablest of his servants must feel himself inadequate : not relaxing our own efforts, because we know that the work in effect is his ; but exulting in the privilege, while we tremble under the responsibility, of being instruments in his hands, to set forward his glory, and the salvation of men ; and anxious above all things, that we may be able to say to him, when he shall require of us an account of the souls over which he has

appointed us to watch, Lord, *of those whom thou gavest me, have I lost none.*<sup>26</sup>

And now, in the presence of Him, to whom we must all ere long give account,—I, as *having been allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel*<sup>27</sup> for your good; and you, for the improvement which you have made of the opportunities afforded to you,—let me acknowledge, with thankfulness, the comfort and support which I have experienced, in your diligent and regular attendance upon my ministry; your increased and increasing obedience to the last request of a crucified Saviour; your ready and free cooperation with me in every scheme of charity, by which, as the Apostle said, *ye have shown before the churches the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf;*<sup>28</sup> *and your zeal hath provoked very many.*<sup>29</sup> If such a return, for earnest though imperfect endeavours to promote your eternal welfare, has created a bond of affection, which no change of circumstances can or ought to destroy, I have great reason to be thankful to him, whose servant I am, that the still more important station in his household, to which I have been called, does not cause a final and total

<sup>26</sup> John xviii. 9.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 4.

<sup>28</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 24.

<sup>29</sup> 2 Cor. ix. 2.

separation between us ; but leaves it still a part of my duty, as it must ever be my delight, to watch over your welfare ; not merely as members of that Christian Church, of which I am a minister and a ruler, but as the inhabitants of a parish, the spiritual interests of which are placed by the laws more exclusively under my personal care and jurisdiction. I thank God that I have lived amongst you to see the commencement of another place for Christian worship, according to the forms of our Church ; by which the spiritual destitution of a part, at least, of this parish and district will be supplied : and allow me to suggest to you, that as the erection of that edifice will entail no expense upon the inhabitants of this parish, they may reasonably be expected to be the more liberal in their contributions towards supplying the religious wants of other places. An opportunity is this day offered to you, of aiding the exertions of a Society, which I do not hesitate to describe as being, at the present juncture, the most important of all Societies to the interests of the Established Church, and to the improvement of the people. I am at a loss to conceive how any sincere member of that Church, who possesses the means, can forbear from adding his contribution to that, which may truly be

termed the treasury of the Lord's house, when he considers, by the expenditure of how trifling a sum he may secure for one of his poor brethren the privilege and comfort of hearing the Word of God, and of performing the duty of public worship.

The Society for Promoting the Building and Enlargement of Churches, is supported entirely by voluntary subscriptions; but it is supported only in a degree unworthy of this Christian nation. Its funds, inadequate as they were, have been most economically husbanded, and most judiciously dispensed. By the expenditure of less than 110,000*l.* it has been instrumental in providing more than 150,000 additional sittings in Church, of which more than 116,000 are unappropriated, and free for the accommodation of the poor.

Since, in proportion as you increase the number of those who are instructed in the principles of our National Church, additional facilities must be provided for their attendance upon her ordinances, or they will of necessity desert her communion, and perhaps embrace no other; and since, by a subscription of so small a sum as about fifteen shillings, you may secure the perpetual advantage of a free sitting in Church for

one of your poorer brethren ; surely you will not hesitate to contribute, to the very extent of your power, towards providing them with those opportunities and advantages, for your own enjoyment of which, I trust, you have great reason to bless the goodness of God. I ask of you this mark of gratitude and affection towards the Church of which you are members. The Church herself asks it of you, as a proof of your sincere attachment to her, as an integral and valuable part of the constitution of this favoured country ; but still more, as having been the instrument, I hope the effectual instrument, in the hands of God, of promoting your own personal holiness, and your chance of everlasting salvation.

And now, *finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect ; be of good comfort ; be of one mind ; live in peace ; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*<sup>30</sup> *Remember them which have had the rule over you ; who have spoken unto you the Word of God ; whose faith follow ; considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ;*<sup>31</sup> and listen, with the same gladness and teachableness, to those who shall henceforth be entrusted with the same spiritual charge over you : *let your*

<sup>30</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 11.

<sup>31</sup> Heb. xiii. 7.



*conversation be such as becometh the Gospel; that whether I come and see you, or be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind; not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, working out your own salvation, with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.<sup>22</sup> And may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>22</sup> Phil. i. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Heb. xiii. 20.



## NOTES.



## NOTES.

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### SERMON I.

P. 2. *It is a question, &c.*] “Christianity being supposed to be either true, or credible, it is unspeakable irreverence, and really the most presumptuous rashness, to treat it as a light matter. It can never justly be esteemed of little consequence, till it be supposed positively false. Nor do I know a higher and more important obligation which we are under, than that of examining most seriously into the evidence of it; supposing its credibility; and of embracing it, upon supposition of its truth.” Bp. Butler’s Analogy, p. 226. See Sermon IX. p. 150.

P. 12. “Even those Christians, to whom, upon their faith, the Holy Spirit is promised and bestowed, are, by previous operation of God’s grace, (opening their minds, inclining their hearts, and tempering their affections,) induced to embrace Christianity, faith itself being a gift of God, and a fruit of the Holy Spirit.”—“We may discern and show very conspicuous footsteps of divine grace, working in part, and producing no despicable fruits of moral virtue, of justice and honesty, temperance and sobriety, benignity and bounty, courage and constancy in worthy enterprises; meekness, patience, modesty; prudence and discretion; yea, of piety

and devotion in some manner even among pagans ; which if we allow not to have been in all respects so complete, as to instate the persons endowed with them, or practisers of them, in God's favour, or to bring them to salvation ; yet those qualities and actions (in degree, or in matter at least, so good, and so conformable to God's law,) we can hardly deny to have been the gifts of God, and the effects of divine grace." Barrow's Sermons, Vol. III. p. 329. folio ed. " The fourth consideration is, that God rewards those that have made use of the single talent, that lowest proportion of grace, which he is pleased to give ; and the method of his rewarding is by giving them more grace ; which as it is in some degree applicable to heathens, who have certainly the talent of natural knowledge, and are strictly responsible for it, so if they use not that, but *retain the truth in unrighteousness* (Rom. i. 18), that makes their condition the same with ours (who are finally lost also, and at the present have our talent taken away from us), if we make not the due use of it." Dr. Hammond's Letter to Dr. Sanderson, *Works*, Vol. I. p. 674. Again : " When it is considered, what the state of our corrupt will is, being naturally averted from God, and strongly inclined to evil, it seems to me scarce proper to call this, in relation to supernatural virtues, a *free will*, till God, by his preventing grace, hath in some degree manumitted it, till Christ hath made it free. Being then what it is, *i. e.* in some degree emancipated by God's grace, and by grace only, (this act of Christ's love and grace being reached out to enemies, to men in their corrupt state of aversion and opposition to God,) the will is then enabled (still by the same principle of grace) to *choose life*, when it is proposed, and the ways and means to it ; and though it be still left free to act or not to act, to *choose* or not to choose, yet when it doth act and choose life, it doth it no otherwise (to my understanding) than the body doth perform all the actions of life, merely by the strength of the

soul; and that continual animation it hath, it receives from it; which makes the parallel complete; and gave ground to the expression and comparison betwixt giving of natural life, and regeneration." P. 679. It is not pretended that this view of the subject is free from the difficulty which embarrasses all our reasonings, when we attempt to reconcile the notion of preventing grace with that of free will. It only removes that difficulty one step, and throws it back upon our necessary ignorance of what may be termed the moving force of God's providence in the moral government of the world; that force which originates a series of secondary causes and effects, and which must, however remotely, *as far as we are able to judge of causation*, be the first cause of every act of volition; for "the laws of nature, bringing forth her various productions, were of his establishment; the workings of chance followed from some determinate causes, though to us unknown; these again from some other prior, and so on in a continual channel from the sources first opened by the exertion of his power; for no event, however casual, can happen without something occasioning it to fall out in that manner; the actions of men proceed according to their apprehensions and judgments, thrown upon them by their constitution or temperament, by education, by company and occurrences befalling them in life, all of which were conveyed by nature or fortune, and therefore must be referred to the origin from whence they are derived. For every effect must be produced by the action of some agent, material or spiritual, or the concurrence of several, and must follow according to the manner of that action being exerted; which manner was determined by some impulse or motive impressed from elsewhere, nor can we stop, until we arrive at some act of omnipotence." Tucker's *Light of Nature*, ch. 26, p. 269. Thus, then, in effect, the real difficulty of this question is closely connected, if not identified, with that which is at the bottom of all the

great questions in controversy between Arminians and Calvinists, and which has disturbed the peace of the Church from its first foundation, the existence of evil in the world ; for we should feel no difficulty in ascribing all our thoughts and intentions to a divine impulse, through whatever channels communicated, if they were all pure and holy. I need hardly add, that by the initial or inceptive grace which I have here spoken of, something is meant very different from what was called by the Semipelagians, *the first grace of God, that is, the law of nature*. (See Jortin's Dissertations, p. 84.) Upon the whole of this question I would recommend the perusal of Dr. Hey's Remarks on the Tenth Article. See Sermon V. p. 86, and the note on p. 53.

P. 16. *a presumption in its favour.*] "What can be more for the honour of a religion, than that it drives from it all determined wickedness, as not able to bear the splendour of its visage ; especially when we consider, that this same religion, so terrible to hardened vice, bears the most benignant aspect to a repentant sinner, whom she invites to her bosom, and to whom she communicates all her comforts and consolations ?" Warburton's Sermons, *Works*, Vol. IV. p. 409.

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#### SERMON II.

P. 21. "Did religion bestow heaven without any terms or conditions indifferently upon all ; if the *crown of life* was hereditary, and free to good and bad ; and not settled by covenant upon the elect of God only, such as *live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world* ; I believe there would be no such thing as an infidel among us. And without



controversy, it is the way and means of attaining to heaven, that make profane scorers so willingly let go the expectation of it. It is not the articles of the creed, but the duty to God and their neighbour, that is such an inconsistent, incredible legend. They will not practise the rules of religion, and therefore cannot believe the promises and rewards of it." Bentley's Confut. of Atheism, Sermon I. p. 5.

P. 24. I am afraid that this is too accurate a description of the religious instruction which is usually given to the youth of this Christian country, in the higher and middle classes of society. A change for the better seems now to be taking place in our great schools: it is to be hoped that the instruction, which is there afforded to the rising generation, will not be restricted to lectures on the Greek Testament, the Catechism, or the Evidences, but that it will extend itself to lessons of practical piety and virtue.

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### SERMON III.

P. 39. *attributes, &c.*] See Archbishop King's Discourse on Predestination, p. 19, with Dr. Whately's valuable Remarks.

P. 53. "*Vain men would be wise*; they would fain go to the bottom of things, when, alas! they scarce understand the very surface of them. They will allow no *mysteries* in religion, and yet every thing is a mystery to them. They will bear with nothing in religion which they cannot comprehend; but above other things the divine perfections, even those which are most absolute and necessary, are above their reach."—"God may reveal something to us, which we are bound to

believe, and yet after that revelation the manner of it may be incomprehensible by us, and consequently a *mystery* to us." Bp. Stillingfleet on Scripture Mysteries. "Nature abounds in mysteries, of which we may have a certain knowledge, but no clear conception; some are too large for imagination to grasp; some too minute for it to discern; others too obscure to be seen distinctly; and others, though plainly discernible in themselves, yet remain inexplicable in the manner of production, or appear incompatible with one another. Therefore though conception be the groundwork of knowledge, and the inconceivableness of a thing a good argument against its reality, yet it is not an irrefragable one; for it may be overpowered by other proofs, drawn from premises whereof we have a clear conception and undoubted knowledge." Tucker's Light of Nature, ch. 14, p. 381. This concluding observation is precisely applicable to the doctrine of Three Persons in one God. It is inconceivable, as to its mode; and so is the mode of God's existence inconceivable; but this inconceivableness is not an irrefragable argument against its reality; for it is overpowered by this argument, that it is asserted in the Word of God, and we have a clear conception and undoubted knowledge of these facts, that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that they assert this doctrine.

P. 53. *God is able to reconcile his seeming contradictions.*] Dr. Hammond, in the postscript to his Third Letter on Pre-science, addressed to Dr. Sanderson, having briefly stated the notion of God's immense and infinite knowledge, and that of future contingents not predetermined by God, nor caused by any necessity, concludes with the following memorable caution: "If, taking these propositions apart, any Christian can doubt the truth of either of them, he sees the shelves he splits upon, and the shipwreck of a great part of the faith, whether on this or on that side. But if he cannot but assent to these truths

severally, and only wants the skill of reconciling the seeming difficulties which they beget, when he attempts to put them together (of which sort are all the inconveniences or objections produced in this matter), let him, on that occasion, consider how more than credible it is, that he doth not understand all things that are, having but *finite* faculties, and *finite* measures, which are not proportioned to *infinite* powers, or objects; which makes it most seasonable to supersede all farther inquiries, and to acquiesce in an assurance that God can reconcile his own contradictions; such, I mean, as though by the known rules of logic they appear to be really no contradictions, yet by us are conceived to approach near to such, through prejudice, or thinking (not too little, but rather) too much upon them. In which case, to restrain our farther searches is the same necessary mortification which it is to restrain inordinate appetites, and is a principal piece of duty owing to the Apostle's precept of *φρονεῖν εἰς τὸ σωφρονεῖν*, *being wise unto sobriety*: God give the world of Christian professors more of it, than is yet discernible among them." A pious and charitable wish, to which we have still good reason to say, Amen!

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SERMON IV.

P. 64. *renovation.*] In the case of adults, renovation by the Holy Spirit must take place, to a certain extent, before he can receive baptismal regeneration, but not that effectual renovation, which takes place in those who become entitled, in virtue of their covenant with God, to the full and sufficient aid of the enlightening and sanctifying Spirit. See Waterland on Regeneration, Vol. VI. p. 349.

P. 66. "There is to the outward tender of grace, in the ministry of the Gospel, annexed an inward offer also of the same to the heart, by the Spirit of God going along with his Word, which some of the schoolmen call *auxilium gratie generale*, sufficient in itself to convert the soul of the hearer, if he do not resist the Holy Ghost, and reject the grace offered." Dr. Sanderson's Letter to Dr. Hammond, who says, in remarking upon this proposition, that "the whole tenour of the New Testament enforceth the same." It is not enough that God has given us his law, unless he enlightens and disposes us to the reception of it; *Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.* (Ps. cxix. 18.) "It is the Spirit that gives true light, and likewise gives it reception." Waterland, Vol. IX. p. 328. "He opens the heart and creates a new one; and without this new creation, this new principle of life, we may hear the Word of God, but we can never understand it; we hear the sound, but are never the better: unless there be in our hearts a secret conviction by the Spirit of God, the Gospel itself is a dead letter, and worketh not in us the light and righteousness of God." Bp. Jer. Taylor, Vol. VI. p. 389.

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SERMON V.

P. 75. *different distribution of gifts.*] *διαρέσεις.* So in v. 11, *πνεῦμα διαροῦν ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστῳ καθὼς βούλεται.*

P. 77. *administrations.*] *διακονῶν.* Bp. Pearce paraphrases it, "There are several sorts of orders established in the Church." It more properly means *services.* It is the province of one who is *Κύριος*, to appoint his servants to different *διακονίαι.*

P. 78. *operations.*] ἐνεργήματα, *miraculous powers, communicated by the Spirit*, called in v. 10, ἐνεργήματα δυναμέων. So Matt. xiv. 2, αὐτὸς ἠγέρθη ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο αἱ δυνάμεις ἐεργούσιν ἐν αὐτῷ.

P. 82. *Miracles ceased in the Church, either at the death of the Apostles, and first preachers of the Gospel, or shortly afterwards.*] That is to say, the standing power of working miracles. It is well known how vehement a controversy was excited by this position, when it was advanced by Dr. Middleton; and yet we need not scruple to admit, that there was less to object to in the position itself, than in his method of asserting it. I entirely agree with the present Bishop of Lincoln, in thinking it most probable, that the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples, upon whom the Apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands; and that it ceased altogether at the death of the last individual who had so received it; yet that the Almighty might still interpose for the protection of his Church, by special and visible demonstrations of his power.<sup>1</sup> If Papias, who flourished about the beginning of the second century, related certain miracles, not as having witnessed any himself, but on a report made to him by others, especially by the daughters of Philip the Apostle,<sup>2</sup> (the miracle related by them having probably been wrought by their father,) we are naturally led to infer, that they were of rare occurrence in his time. The expression of Irenæus,<sup>3</sup> that “*even down to his own time, specimens, or instances, of the divine miraculous power had been left in some churches,*” implies that it was then all but extinguished: the verb ὑπολείπειν indicates that

<sup>1</sup> Eccl. Hist. illustr. from Tertullian, pp. 98, 105. With respect to one of the most remarkable of these alleged interpositions, that of the Thundering Legion, the supernatural part of the story is exploded by P. E. Jablonski in a learned and conclusive Dissertation, Opusc. T. IV. pp. 3—37.

<sup>2</sup> Euseb. III. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ap. Euseb. V. 7.

a small part only was remaining of the whole. Afterwards, indeed, he speaks, in general terms, of a great many instances of extraordinary spiritual gifts still subsisting in the Church : but it may be collected, from the quotation made by Eusebius at the end of the chapter, that Irenæus spoke from hearsay, rather than from his personal knowledge and observation ; *καθὼς καὶ πολλῶν ἀκούομεν ἀδελφῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ προφητικὰ χαρίσματα ἐχόντων.* (See Lord Barrington on the Teaching and Witness of the Holy Spirit, Bp. Watson's Theol. Tracts, Vol. IV. p. 453.) It is evident that the gift of prophecy was that, which of all spiritual gifts was the most likely to be feigned, because the truth or falsehood of a pretence to it could only be ascertained by the event. A few surviving instances of those who did really possess this gift, would, to a certain degree, sanction the pretensions of others who falsely laid claim to it. Speaking of Montanus, and other pretended prophets, Eusebius says, *πλείστα γὰρ οὖν καὶ ἄλλαι παραδοξοποιεῖται τοῦ θεοῦ χαρίσματος εἰσέτι τότε κατὰ διαφόρους ἐκκλησίας ἐκτελούμεναι, πίστιν παρὰ πολλοῖς τοῦ κακίονος προφητείας παρεῖχον.*<sup>4</sup> But that in the time of Montanus no gift of prophecy existed in the church, we may infer from the argument employed by the ancient author of the Treatise against the Cataphrygians,<sup>5</sup> who, in contrasting the pseudoprophetical

<sup>4</sup> V. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Routh, *Reliquiæ Sacr.* T. II. p. 82. These heretics are called by Eusebius, *Phryges*, and were so named from the district where they dwelt. Those who followed their opinions, were said to be of the sect *κατὰ Φρύγας*, according to the *Phrygians*; and hence, by a strange corruption, the sect itself came to be called the sect of the Cataphrygas, Cataphryges, and lastly, by a most anomalous compound, Cataphrygæ. Eusebius says that Apollinarius wrote *κατὰ τῆς (τῶν) Φρυγῶν αἵρέσεως* (IV. 27.); but in v. 18, he makes mention *τῆς κατὰ Φρύγας καλουμένης αἵρέσεως*; and the author of the Appendix to Tertullian de Præscript. Hæret. p. 223, ed. Rigalt, speaks of *hæretici qui dicuntur Secundum Phrygas*. I do not understand why he did not write *Cata Phrygas*, seeing that he presently adds, *sunt enim qui kata Proclum dicuntur, sunt qui Secundum Æschinem pronuntiantur*. See Ittigius de Hæresiarchis, p. 216. Clemens Alex. (Strom. IV. 13.) calls them *Φρύγες*. If the other form be adopted, we should write not

extacies of the Montanists with the inspiration of true prophets under the new covenant, does not adduce any *contemporary* instances, but mentions Agabus, Judas, Silas, the daughters of Philip, Ammia of Philadelphia, and Quadratus, and certain others. I believe that the only miracles (exclusive of prophecy) related to have been performed in the first century, besides those which are recorded in the New Testament, are the two mentioned by Papias, and two which are said, but upon doubtful authority, to have occurred in the person of St. John. (See Ittigius, Hist. Eccl. Primi Seculi, p. 487.) The evidence of Chrysostom, although it does not expressly prove the cessation of miracles immediately after the apostolic age, is strongly in favour of that supposition. Speaking of the time of the Apostles he says, τὰ σημεῖα τότε χρησίμως ἐγένετο, καὶ νῦν χρησίμως οὐ γίνεται. Homil. V. in 1 Cor. and again (Homil. XLII. in Act. Apostol. p. 277.) διὰ τοῦτο παρὰ μὲν τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἀναξίους χαρίσματα ἐδίδοτο· χρεῖαν γὰρ εἶχε τὸ παλαιὸν, τῆς πίστεως ἕνεκα, ταύτης τῆς βοήθειας· νῦν δὲ οὐδὲ ἀξίους δέδοται· ἡ γὰρ ἰσχὺς τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ταύτης δεῖται τῆς συμμαχίας. See Suicer in v. Σημεῖον. Bishop Douglas, in his Criterion, p. 385, has discussed the testimonies of Papias, Irenæus, and Origen, and shown that they prove but little, as to the continuance of miracles beyond the Apostolic age; and he concludes, "I am confident, that every one who has examined the question before us with any accuracy, will find reason to subscribe to the opinion of a writer well known in our Church, that the miracles of the Fathers may be rejected, without any mischief, and yet the miracles of the Apostles, and of their Master, may be maintained, as true and certain." To his remarks upon the testimony of Origen I may add, that the evidence of that Father, which is adduced for the

*Cataphryges* or *Cataphrygæ*, but οἱ κατὰ φρίγας, or *hæretici secundum Phrygas*. Firmilianus in Epist. ad Cyprianum (quoted by Dr. Routh Reliq. Sacr. T. I. p. 473), *Illi qui Cataphrygas appellantur*.

subsistence of miraculous powers in his days, appears to me to be nearly conclusive against it. His words are (contra Cels. p. 80, ed. Cantab.) γενναῖον δ' ἔργον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, τὸ μέχρι σήμερον θεραπεύεσθαι τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ, οὗς ὁ Θεὸς βούλεται. Now it seems to me, that these concluding words, *whom God willeth to be healed*, indicate very plainly, that the attempts, which no doubt were made, to effect miraculous cures, were not always successful; and if so, we may safely infer that where they did succeed, they were to be ascribed to the ordinary means of healing, under the divine blessing. We are not informed whether these cures were instantaneous, nor whether the diseases cured were such as were notoriously past the reach of ordinary remedies; both of which peculiarities distinguished the cures wrought by our Saviour and his Apostles. Origen says, indeed, (p. 124.) that he had seen many who *had been* cured of very obstinate symptoms, extacies, madneses, and numberless other disorders,—just the sort of cures which were most likely to be attempted, and most likely to be attended with apparent success. And they were effected, he adds, by invoking the name of Jesus, and by repeating some history concerning him. This additional charm throws great suspicion over the reality of the miracle. Again, (p. 337.) “There were many signs of the Holy Spirit at the beginning of the teaching of Jesus; more after his ascension; and afterwards fewer; but even now there are vestiges of him with a few, whose minds have been purified by the Word, and by actions agreeable thereto;” a mode of expression which, under all the circumstances of the case, may be regarded as equivalent to an admission, that there were then no well-authenticated instances of the subsistence of a spirit of prophecy.

Dr. Barrow's opinion was, that miraculous powers were of longer continuance in the Church; and that although “the frequent performance of such works among them, in whom



faith, by abundance of other competent means, may be produced and confirmed, *unto whom also the first miracles are virtually present, by the help of history and good reason*, is indeed no wise necessary, nor perhaps would be convenient ;” yet in the conversion of heathen infidels, pious and zealous persons “ would be enabled to perform whatever miraculous works should conduce to that purpose.” (Vol. IV. p. 467, ed. Oxf.) A supposition which takes for granted, first, that the conversion of such heathens, in any given instance, is as necessary to the accomplishment of the divine purposes in the Gospel, as it was at the first preaching of Christianity ; and secondly, that there are no other means, short of miracles, by which such conversion can be effected. In this opinion Archbishop Tillotson also concurs, Serm. Vol. III. p. 247 ; but it is not justified by experience, nor warranted by the necessity of the case. I do not understand why *any* unbeliever may not require a miracle to prove the truth of Christianity now, as well as an unenlightened heathen. If it be said, that the former is qualified to understand and appreciate the force of its historical evidences, but not the latter, who needs some simpler and more immediate demonstration of its truth ; I answer, this proves the necessity of a certain degree of civilization, but not of a miracle. Who is to determine the exact degree of information which shall render miraculous proofs unnecessary ?

This very ignorance, on the part of uncivilized heathens, has been urged by others, as an argument to show that miracles are *not* necessary for their conversion. “ Acosta, inquiring into the cause, why miracles are not wrought by the present missionaries for the conversion of heathen nations, as they were by the Christians of the primitive ages, gives this as one reason, because the Christians were at first ignorant men, and the Gentiles learned ; but now, on the contrary, all the learning in the world is employed for the defence of

the Gospel, and there is nothing but ignorance to oppose it; and there can be no need of further miracles in behalf of so good a cause, against so weak adversaries." (Quoted by Dr. Jenkin, Reasonableness of Christianity, Vol. II. p. 493.) And the truth of this observation will appear from considering, that the Gospel could not possibly have been established in the first instance, by those who were employed as instruments in that work, without miracles: but that now, there being abundant evidence of its truth, accessible to those who are to a certain point instructed, it is possible to convert the heathen, under the ordinary influences of God's Holy Spirit, by preparing their understandings to comprehend that evidence: and it is acknowledged on all hands, that we are not to expect that God will accomplish, by special and extraordinary interposition, that which can be effected by the instrumentality of ordinary means.

The Gospel dispensation is confessedly progressive; a grain of mustard seed growing, however slowly, to the largest of all trees: nor can we, as believers in Providence, entertain any doubt, but that all the features of God's government of the world have some reference to its growth and diffusion; and since its truth has been once firmly established, and remains for ever capable of moral demonstration, there is, as far as we can judge, no occasion for a special interference to effect one solitary step in that great work of conversion, to which all the changes and workings of human affairs are silently tending; and the opportunities and seasons for which it is the part of Christian piety to watch for, and to improve. Christianity was the great nurse and restorer of civilization; and in return, civilization paves the way for Christianity: but be it remembered, that it is no high degree of civilization which is required, to open the understandings of the most barbarous tribe, to a view of their own sinfulness, and of God's anger against unholiness, and consequently of the necessity of some

atonement. And it is a truth, which ought never to be lost sight of by those who are interested in the work of conversion, that many may be brought to *feel* the truth of the Gospel, before they are qualified, in the common acceptation of the term, to *understand* it; an observation of no less importance to him, who preaches that Gospel to unenlightened people in a Christian land, than to him who is sent to instruct the heathen.

It is remarked by Pascal, (quoted by the Bishop of Lincoln, p. 96.) that the Apostles could not urge, in its full force, as a proof of the truth of Christianity to the heathen, the fulfilment of prophecy, because a most important part of that fulfilment was to consist in the conversion of the heathen themselves: that miracles were therefore required to convince them: but that now, prophecy accomplished is a continually subsisting miracle. St. Peter speaks of *the word of prophecy* as being *more sure* than the visible glory of Jesus at his transfiguration, and the audible voice from heaven which declared him to be *the beloved Son of God*. (2. Pet. i. 19.) If, then, prophecy fulfilled be a more indubitable proof of the truth of Christianity than miracles, (not but that prophecy itself is a great miracle,) and if it be also a proof, of which it is by no means difficult for a common understanding to apprehend the force; it is plain that miracles have not been required for the proof of Christianity, since the testimony of prophecy became historically complete. I will conclude this long note by reminding the reader, that the question concerning the continued subsistence of extraordinary spiritual gifts *in the Church*, does not involve the probability of God's having interposed, in some remarkable manner, upon special occasions, in behalf of Christianity. It is hardly going too far to suppose, that the courage and constancy of the earlier martyrs, at least, and perhaps of those who have witnessed a good confession in later ages of the Church, were supported by a special infusion of spiritual strength.

Both in the Sermon, and in these remarks, I have pro-

ceeded upon the supposition, that miracles were in the first instance necessary, to prove the divine authority of the Gospel; but that they are not necessary to enable the Church of Christ to interpret the Gospel rightly, nor to prove which interpretation is the true one.

P. 86. *Enthusiasm.*] “I deny not, but that God is free to send prophets when he pleases, and that he may do so when the exigence of the Church doth require it: but then, whensoever he sends them, he will, as he hath always done, send them with the power of working signs and wonders.” Dr. Hickeys’s *Spirit of Enthusiasm Exorcised, Sermons, Vol. I.* p. 100: a sermon which, although it is not written in a tone of Christian meekness, contains some valuable remarks upon vain pretences to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit. It is justly observed by Baxter, that “the operation of the Spirit in the Apostles was more excellent than the operation of the same Spirit now in us; as producing more excellent effects, and more infallible. Therefore we must not try the Scriptures by our most spiritual apprehensions; but our apprehensions by the Scriptures: that is, we must prefer the Spirit’s inspiring of the Apostles to indite the Scripture, before the Spirit’s illuminating of us to *understand* them, or before any present inspirations, the former being the more perfect.” *Christian Directory, Vol. III. p. 186.*

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#### SERMON VI.

P. 93. *The test of perfection, &c.*] “Our ignorance is the proper answer to many things, which are called objections against religion; particularly to those, which arise from the appearances of evil and irregularity in the constitution of nature, and the government of the world. From our ignorance of the constitution of things, and the scheme of Providence

in the government of the world; from the reference which the several parts have to each other, and to the whole; and from our not being able to see the end, and the whole; it follows, that however perfect things are, they must even necessarily appear to us otherwise, less perfect than they are." Bp. Butler's Sermons, p. 311.

P. 95. *traditionary fables.*] For instance the younger Rosenmüller, in his Introductory Remarks on the Book of Genesis, and the authors whom he quotes. Concerning the writer of the Pentateuch, and the sources from which he drew his knowledge of the facts recorded in the first book, I would refer to the notes appended to my Dissertation on the Promise, p. 122; and, with greater satisfaction, to the excellent Lectures of the late Dean Graves on the Pentateuch, and to Bishop Sumner's Records of Creation.

P. 101. *In order to appreciate, &c.*] The splendid version of a passage in some treatise of Aristotle, which Cicero has given in his second book De Natura Deorum, s. 37, often as it has been quoted, will bear repetition here. "Si essent qui sub terra semper habitavissent bonis et illustribus domiciliis, quæ essent ornata signis atque picturis, instructaque rebus his omnibus, quibus abundant hi, qui beati putantur; nec tamen exissent unquam supra terram, accepissent autem fama et auditione, esse quoddam numen et vim Deorum; deinde aliquo tempore, patefactis terræ faucibus, ex illis abditis sedibus evadere in hæc loca, quæ nos incolimus, atque exire potuissent; cum repente terram, et maria cælumque vidissent, nubium magnitudinem ventorumque vim cognovissent, aspexissentque solem, ejusque tum magnitudinem pulcritudinemque, tum etiam efficientiam cognovissent, quod is diem efficeret, toto cælo luce diffusa; cum autem terras nox opacasset, tum cælum totum cernerent astris distinctum et ornatum, lunæque luminum varietatem tum crescentis, tum senescentis, eorumque

omnium ortus et occasus, atque in omni æternitate ratos immobilesque cursus; hæc cum viderent, profecto et esse Deos, et hæc tanta opera Deorum esse arbitrarentur." But the observation of Cicero, which immediately follows this translation, or rather, as we may safely conclude, this paraphrase of Aristotle, is more applicable to the supposition in the text: "Nos autem tenebras cogitemus tantas, quantæ quondam eruptioni Ætnæorum ignium finitimas regiones obscuravisse dicuntur, ut per biduum nemo hominem homo agnosceret; cum autem tertio die sol illuxisset, tum ut revixisse orbi viderentur. Quid si hoc idem ex æternis tenebris contingeret, ut subito lucem aspiceremus; quænam species cœli videretur? Sed assiduitate quotidiana, et consuetudine oculorum, adsuescunt animi, neque admirantur, neque requirunt rationes earum rerum quas semper vident: perinde quasi novitas nos magis quam magnitudo rerum debeat ad exquisitas causas excitare." The goodness of the Creator in his visible works is perhaps most sensibly perceived, and most justly appreciated by him who has just recovered from a tedious illness: "tanquam bona valetudo jucundior est iis, qui e gravi morbo recreati sunt, quam qui nunquam ægro corpore fuerunt, sic ea omnia desiderata magis, quam assidue percepta, delectant." Cic. ad Quint. Post Redit. 4. I will add the beautiful lines of Gresset, which are but feebly imitated by Gray.

"Sans doute que le Dieu, qui nous rend l'existence,  
 A l'heureuse convalescence  
 Pour de nouveaux plaisirs donne de nouveaux sens;  
 Les plus simples objets, le chant d'une fauvette,  
 Le matin d'un beau jour, la verdure des bois,  
 La fraîcheur d'une violette,  
 Mille spectacles, qu'autrefois  
 On voyoit avec nonchalance,  
 Transportent aujourd'hui, présentent des appas  
 Inconnus à l'indifférence  
 Et que la foule ne voit pas."

## SERMON VII.

P. 116. *It is objected.*] Perhaps it was hardly worth while to notice such an objection; nor should I have done so, had not some divines, in order to escape the difficulty, supposed that there was no rainbow before the flood. "Who," asks Whiston, "but the great governor and disposer of all the works of nature, could so order the constitution of the air after the deluge, that whereas all former generations had never seen nor heard of any such thing, the future should never be without that glorious signal of the divine goodness, and instance of the divine power, the rainbow?" Boyle's Lect. T. II. p. 292. So also Dr. Jackson and Bp. Patrick.

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## SERMON. VIII.

P. 135. *The absolute irreconcilableness, &c.*] It is perhaps more correct to say, "the irreconcilableness of those consequences which follow from the certainty of these two undoubted truths." See the notes on p. 12.

P. 137. *His heart was hardened by lenity and forbearance.*] This is the explanation given by Origen, and some others of the Greek Fathers, of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart; that as kind masters sometimes say to their disobedient servants, I have spoiled you by my kindness; so God might have said, that by his indulgence and long-suffering, he had hardened the heart of Pharaoh. See the quotations in Le Clerc's note on Exod. iv. 21.

P. 142. Strictly speaking, the only sin against the Holy Ghost, which is declared by our Saviour to be a sin unto death, is blasphemy against him; Mark iii. 29, Luke xii. 10: which John Hales supposes to be the attributing to evil spirits the miracles wrought by the power of the Holy Ghost. Tracts, p. 9.

P. 144. *sins against the Holy Ghost.*] “Lest insensibly we fall into those sins, and into those circumstances of person, for which Christ never died, which the Holy Ghost never means to cure, and which the eternal God never will pardon; for there are of this kind more than commonly men imagine, whilst they amuse their spirits with gaieties and false principles, till they have run into horrible impieties, from whence they are not willing to withdraw their foot, and God is resolved never to snatch and force them thence.” Jer. Taylor, Vol. VI. p. 31. Mosheim defines the sin against the Holy Ghost to be “*malitiosa et pertinax non modo repudiatio mediorum illorum, per quæ Spiritus sanctus convertere vult, verum etiam eorundem publica irrisio atque contemptio;*” and he concludes, “*nostra ætate homines ad eundem gradum malitiæ pervenire possunt, ut omnia media gratiæ rejiciant, eaque quoque irrideant et contemnant.*” Elem. Theol. Dogm. p. 547.

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#### SERMON X.

P. 166. *The Psalms—an epitome of the Scriptures.*] “The Book of Psalms,” says Basil, “comprehends what is useful in every part of the Scriptures. It prophesies future things; reminds us of what is past; lays down rules of life; suggests



what should be done ; and, in a word, is a common storehouse of doctrines, providing exactly what is suitable to every case." "Herein is a complete body of theology ; a foretelling of Christ's advent in the flesh ; a threatening of judgment ; the hope of a resurrection ; the fear of punishment ; promises of glory ; revelations of mysteries ; all are treasured and preserved in the Book of Psalms, as in a vast and common storehouse." Basil. Homil. in Ps. p. 125.

P. 172. *an exclusive intercourse.*] So far exclusive, that as the gods were supposed to be most propitiated by the richest offerings, the poor had but little encouragement to apply to them. It is true, that some of the philosophers and poets of classical antiquity taught a better doctrine, that purity of heart was a surer passport to the favour of their deities, than costly sacrifices ; but their emphatic assertion of this truth proves that it was not the popular persuasion. And even *they* did not make humility an ingredient in that disposition of mind, which was to sanctify the offering of a poor votary ; but rather those qualities which were considered to belong, for the most part, to the philosopher and the statesman :

"Compositum jus fasque animo, sanctosque recessus  
Mentis, et incoctum generoso pectus honesto."

P. 181. *effectual.*] *ἐνεργουμένη*. *Assidua*, Vulg. Schleusner takes it in the passive sense, *quod multo labore fit*. I think it is used precisely in the same sense as in Gal. v. 6, *πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη*. We might properly render it, *the energetic prayer of a righteous man*.

*Ibid.* *striving, or wrestling.*] *ἀγωνιζόμενος*. Schleusner, one of whose chief faults is, that he unnecessarily multiplies the significations of words, after having properly explained

ἀγωνιζόμενος, in Coloss. i. 29, *summe pro hac re obtinenda contendens*, adds, as another meaning of the word, *assiduous sum in aliqua re*, and then cites this passage, where the word manifestly signifies not so much *frequency* as *earnestness* of contention; as in Dan. vi. 14. (LXX.) *περὶ τοῦ Δαυὶλ ἠγωνίσαστο τοῦ ἐξελέσθαι αὐτόν*. 1. Thess. ii. 2. *λαλήσαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν πολλῷ ἀγῶνι*. Possibly St. Paul may have alluded to Jacob's wrestling with the angel. So Coloss. ii. 1. *θέλω γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἶδέναι ἠλίκον ἀγῶνα ἔχω περὶ ὑμῶν—ἵνα παρακληθῶσι αἱ καρδίαι*, the true meaning of which is hardly expressed by our received version, *I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you*. It should rather be, *how earnestly I strive for you*, i. e. in prayer.

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SERMON XI.

P. 194. *an overpowering sense of its own sinfulness.*] I mean such a sense as may break down all conceit of its own righteousness, and inspire it with an opinion of extreme danger, and with an earnest desire to find a place of refuge. All this may be felt, without that intense and overwhelming grief, which some persons, of a certain constitution and habit of mind, perhaps *cannot* feel; while others are naturally disposed to it; and "in all inquiries concerning penitential sorrow, if we will avoid scruple and vexatious fancies, we must be careful not to account of our sorrow by the measures of sense, but of religion." Jer. Taylor on Penance, Vol. IX. p. 228. At the same time we must beware of resting satisfied with low degrees of sorrow for sin; for our love of the Redeemer is likely to be in proportion to our sense of the curse from which he has redeemed us. He will *love most*

who is most sensible how much has been forgiven him. (Luke vii. 47.)

P. 201. *Sorrow for sin—matter of joy.*] “The Spirit worketh joy in discovering, and bending the heart to mourn for corruption.” “As in wicked laughter the heart may be sorrowful, so in holy mourning the heart may rejoice; for all spiritual afflictions have a peaceable fruit.” Bp. Reynolds, Vol. II. p. 47.

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#### SERMON XII.

P. 204. *Corinth, a rich and luxurious city.*] Although the city of Corinth never recovered from the effects of its capture and spoliation by Mummius, yet its situation rendered it so eligible an emporium for merchants trading to the different provinces of Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor, that it attained by degrees to a considerable pitch of prosperity. A century after its destruction by the Romans, Julius Cæsar sent thither a colony of Libertini; and within another century from that time it was so populous, as to rank amongst the first cities of Greece. The prosperity of this colony was owing partly to the convenience of its site, which perhaps induced the Roman Proconsul to make it his residence, if we are to infer from the account given in Acts xviii. 12, that Gallio was actually resident at Corinth, and not merely visiting it for the purpose of administering justice. The former supposition is rendered probable by the expression of Aristides, who says of Corinth, ἔτι καὶ νῦν βραβεύει τὰ δίκαια τοῖς Ἕλλησι, and by that of Apuleius, who calls it *totius provinciæ Achaicæ caput*. A second cause of its prosperity was,

the periodical solemnity of the Isthmian games, the superintendence of which was restored to the Corinthians, upon the establishment of the colony (Pausan. II. 2. p. 183. Fac.) Dio Prusæus, (Chrysostomus) who lived under Trajan, says to the Corinthians, *ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἔστε νῦν, τὸ δὴ λεγόμενον, πρῶρα καὶ πρύμνα τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ὄλβιοι μὲν καὶ ἀφνειοί, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἐκ παλαιῶν χρόνων ὑπὸ ποιητῶν καὶ τῶν θεῶν ὀνομαζόμενοι.* (p. 464. 18.) Due allowance being made for rhetorical amplification, this passage will still prove that Corinth was then a very flourishing place. Another Chrysostom, more deserving of that epithet, describes Corinth as being, in his time, *πρώτην τῆν Ἑλλάδος πόλιν*, (T. III. p. 243. ed. Savil.) and as populous and very wealthy, *πόλιν μεγάλην καὶ πολυάνθρωπον, καὶ πλούτου ἐνέκεν θαυμαστήν.* It appears from 2 Cor. viii. and ix. that amongst the Christians in that place there was no lack of wealth. The writer of the Epistle to the Corinthians, which goes under the name of Clemens Romanus, speaks of their splendid hospitality, *τὸ μεγαλοπρεπὲς τῆς φιλοξενίας ὑμῶν.* It is designated on coins as *Μητρόπολις.* Pausanias informs us, that in his time, of those objects of curiosity which were most deserving of notice, some were the relics of its ancient grandeur, but the greater part were monuments of its more recent prosperity, *τὰ δὲ πολλὰ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκμῆς ἐποιήθη τῆς ὕστερον* (T. I. p. 185. Fac.) I see that Mr. Cramer, in his Description of Ancient Greece, Vol. III. p. 22, translates the words of Pausanias as follows: "Within the walls there are still many relics of antiquity, and also numerous works executed in the flourishing times of the republic." I believe the meaning of Pausanias to be, that "some are what still remain of the ancient works, but the greater part of them were made in the height of the latter prosperity," *i. e.* after the colonization of Corinth; "faits depuis son rétablissement." Cuvier. The phrase in which Strabo speaks of the destruction of that city, *κατέσκαπτο*,

implies an almost total destruction of its chief buildings, especially when we find Polybius lamenting the entire disregard which the soldiers manifested towards the works of art, (Strabo VIII. p. 381. B.) It is evident, from the compliments paid to the Corinthians by Dio Prusæus, that they were proud of being spoken of, as though they had been descended from the former inhabitants of the city, being in fact sprung from the dregs of the Roman people; and that they appropriated to themselves the mythological honours of ancient Corinth. It is probable then, that they were careful to perform all the traditional rites which belonged to those deities, whose temples had escaped the havoc of the Roman soldiery;<sup>6</sup> as well as to those of more recent introduction, such as Jupiter Capitolinus, Isis, Serapis, and Octavia, the sister of Augustus, (Pausan. II. 3, 4.) and it was probably at the sacrificial entertainments in the temples of these foreign divinities that the Christians had been tempted to be present. That their mode of living was luxurious, may be inferred from the practices which had crept into the celebration of the Lord's supper; and that they were devoted to the pursuit of gain, as was natural, considering their origin and employment, we may collect from some expressions of St. Paul, (1 Cor. vi. 7, 8, 10, 11.) The city of Corinth abounded with sophists and rhetoricians, as we learn from Chrysostom and Aristides, some of whom probably taught the same doctrine which Dicæarchus had maintained at Corinth in an earlier age, *animos esse mortales*, (Cic. Tusc. Disp. I. 31.) This sketch of the state of Corinth in the Apostolic age, will throw light upon several features of St. Paul's two epistles to the Corinthians. The reader may find other authorities in a Dissertation by Henry Wilckens,

<sup>6</sup> Pausanias says, that the honours paid to the children of Medea by the ancient Corinthians were not revived by the Colonists; from which exception, it may be inferred, that this was not the case in other instances.

entitled, *Specimen Antiquitatum Corinthiacarum Selectarum*, printed in the *Collectio Opusculorum Historico-philologico-theologicorum*, which was published at Bremen in 1768, T. I. p. 430.

P. 218. *there may be no neutrality.*] “Thus they think to salve all, by maintaining a neutrality, and compounding the business, yielding an open conformity to the world, and reserving a secret regard to God; sinning publicly, and privately repenting; retaining their credit, quiet, ease, pleasure, with their conscience and peace of mind; affecting some piety, but avoiding the scandal of it. They would hold fair with both sides; so that neither the world should persecute them for crossing its humour, nor God punish them for transgressing his will.”—“He will not endure that we should hold amity or correspondence with his enemies; particularly with the world, the friendship whereof he hath declared inconsistent with his favour.” Barrow, Vol. III. p. 294.

P. 222. *charge of peculiarity.*] “Did Elias, to shun the imputation of singularity, or in regard to common practice, swerve from his faithful adherence to God’s service, although he did passionately resent and bewail his case? No; for *I have*, said he, *been very jealous for the Lord of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.*”—“What was the Apostles’ condition? were they not singular men? did not they (a few, simple, poor, weak folk,) doctrine and practice, cross and control the world; confuting, reproving, condemning the generality of men of error, of folly, of wickedness?” Barrow, p. 288.

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## SERMON XIII.

P. 229. *which could not have been intended by a holy and merciful Creator.*] That is to say, as far as we can judge of his intentions from his attributes. It is presumptuous to say absolutely that God *could not* intend this or that, because we cannot possibly know the *end* of his intentions, except so far as he has revealed it to us. But he has revealed to us his love of that which is good ; and his determination to punish those who do evil. We are sure therefore that a holy and merciful Creator did not intend that an evil influence should preponderate in our constitution.

Ibid. *In proportion, &c.*] This is unanswerably proved by Bishop Butler, in his Analogy.

P. 234. *It is the design, &c.*] This sentence, and one in p. 235, are taken from Seed's Posthumous Sermons, Vol. II. p. 47. "It being their design to make men not just so far virtuous, and no farther ; but to make them as virtuous and pious as possible." P. 49. "Our condemnation will not lie in this, that we did not exactly transcribe the original, but that we did not make the copy so complete as was in our power."

## SERMON XIV

P. 248. Dr. Hezekiah Burton's Sermons, from which a quotation is made in this page, were published after his death by Dr. Tillotson, who justly describes them as "weighty and

well digested discourses." But I suppose that each discourse, as printed, must contain at least two or three, as preached : for there are but three of the former in a volume of 547 pages.

P. 260. "Consider the tendency of all the articles of our faith, of all the precepts of our religion, all religious exercises and performances, hearing, praying, reading, they all tend to these (purity and charity;) and if these be not, they are all vain things, and as useless as means are, when the end proves abortive."—"Formal devotionists—have been content to pray for that grace which they never use; and to hear those directions which they never intend to follow; and to be persuaded by the preacher to do that, which they never design to do." Burton, Vol. I. p. 157.

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#### SERMON XVI.

P. 286. *We shall act, &c.*] "Let any one try, whether *future* actions are not represented in Scripture, as dependent on *human* agency; and whether actions, ascribed to *divine* agency, are not in some sense past." Hey's Lectures, Vol. III. p. 237.

P. 288. *Results of the general laws, &c.*] See Bp. Butler's Analogy, Part I. ch. 2, in which he shows that the constitution of nature admits of misery as well as happiness; that both these are, in very many cases, the consequences of our actions, and consequences which we are enabled to foresee.



P. 301. *Such a revival desirable, &c.*] The discipline of public penance having been superseded by that of private penance, which was far more conducive to the power and wealth of the Clergy, nothing remained of it in the western Churches, but the sprinkling of ashes on the heads of the faithful, and the Lent Fast. (See Gavanti Thesaurus Sacrorum Rituum, T. I. p. 879, ed. Merati.) As to the expediency of reviving the ancient discipline, Hamon L'Estrange observes, "that a discipline so apostolical, so primitive, should, in a Church, justly pretending to be the very *parallelogram*, and true representation of those excellent copies, be so nearly invisible; that the restoration thereof should hitherto become the vote of so many, and endeavour of so few, is to me a very great wonder." But he subjoins that, which contains the true objection to such a restoration, in any church which is not governed by inspired rulers; "perhaps some will say, that this strict discipline seemed rather to magnify the power of the keys, and authority of the Clergy, than the mercies of God." Alliance of Divine Offices, p. 334.

P. 303. *The salutary discipline of penance.*] But not the discipline of *public penance*, for the usefulness of which, if not for its indispensableness, much was to be said. "Then for penances and satisfactions (of which they boast so much, as being so great restraints for sin,) these, as they are publicly handled, are nothing but words and ineffective sounds.—They are reduced from the ancient canonical penances to private and arbitrary, from years to hours, from great severity to gentleness and flattery, from fasting and public shame to the saying over their beads, from cordial to ritual, from smart to money, from heartiness and earnestness to pageantry and theatrical images of penance." Jer. Taylor, Dissuasive from Popery, Vol. X. p. 184.

P. 303. *The remission of sins.*] The Church of Rome does not indeed assert that acts of penance do of themselves, by their intrinsic virtue, procure the remission of the penalties due to sin; but still it holds that they are a part of the satisfaction to be paid for the entire forgiveness of sins; and although the Council of Trent declares that all our satisfactions derive their efficacy from the satisfaction made by Jesus Christ;<sup>7</sup> yet the holding them to be satisfactions at all, in any sense or degree, with reference to the remission of sins, is making them a means of procuring that remission, and renders the full efficacy of Christ's death inaccessible and inapplicable, except by the steps of human desert. Certain it is, that however the Council of Trent may have limited the notion of satisfactions, the most popular writers of their Church had been accustomed to speak of penance as doing away sin, in such broad and strong language, as could not fail to create a wrong impression of its efficacy in the minds of the people at large. There can be no question but that the lower orders, at least, of Roman Catholics believe in the meritorious nature of acts of penance, as making *amends* for sin. What other opinion would they be likely to draw from such expressions as those of Massillon, quoted in p. 316, or from the following words of Morinus, as given by Basnage in the Introduction to his History of the Reformed Churches, p. 190. "God, who has granted to his Church a great number of miraculous gifts, has done for her nothing more *august*, than the conferring on her authority to forgive sins. The Priests, seated on their tribunal, require from the penitent an exact account of his past life, prescribe to him a rule for the time to come, and give him laws for the direction of his actions and thoughts; impose upon him acts of penance more or less severe, and change all *eternal punishments into temporal pains*. Tell us,

<sup>7</sup> Which is also the language of Thomas Aquinas. P. III. Qu. 86. Art.

if there be any thing on earth more worthy of admiration." The doctrine of penitential satisfactions began to be explicitly treated of in the thirteenth century by Duns Scotus, the subtil doctor, "who," says Allix, "expressly makes them expiations for past sins, and, if possible, is more subtil about them than other things." Preservative against Popery, Tit. VIII. p. 77.

P. 305. *in laying aside.*] I ought rather to have said, in not attempting to restore; for the only parts of public penance which were retained in the Church of Rome, and were laid aside by our Church at the Reformation, were the sprinkling with ashes and holy water. It is indeed true, that public penance, of a certain kind, is still decreed against some offenders by our spiritual courts, who would no doubt gladly find themselves relieved from the duty of inflicting such a punishment. That it is extremely desirable to introduce into our Church some clear and rational system of excommunication, cannot be denied; but the danger of abuse is so great, even under the best system, administered by uninspired judges, that the attempt would be exceedingly hazardous. I doubt very much, whether the suggestions made by the authors of the *Reformatio Legum* could be carried into effect.

P. 315. *Repentance is not attainable without grace.*] "If God gives not repenting grace, there will be an hard heart and a dry eye, maugre all the poor frustraneous endeavours of nature. A piece of brass may as easily melt, or a flint be water itself, as the heart of man, by any innate power of its own, resolve itself into a penitential humiliation. If God does not, by an immediate blow of his omnipotence, strike the rock, these waters will never gush out." Dr. South, Serm. Vol. VI. p. 263.

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## SERMON XVIII.

P. 323. The following passage from Gregory Nazianzen is beautifully descriptive both of the good Shepherd, and of the faithful pastors of his flock ; “ folding us in a place of much grass, and feeding us beside the waters of repose ; and leading us forth, and fighting for us against the wild beasts ; reducing the wanderers to the right path ; recovering that which is lost, binding up that which is bruised, guarding that which is strong ; and thus preserving all, by the rules and measures of pastoral skill, for that fold which is beyond the grave.” Orat. XXXVI. p. 592.

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## SERMON XIX.

P. 349. *that good people should suffer.*] See Butler's Analogy, Part II. ch. 5. Dr. Powell's Third Charge, p. 347. Ludlam's Essays, p. 92.

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## SERMON XX.

P. 358. *it is only by his resurrection.*] The miracle of the resurrection set the seal of divine authenticity to all the preceding miracles of Jesus, and made them all undoubted proofs of his Messiahship, which they would not have been, had he not risen from the dead, agreeably to the ancient prophecies, and his own emphatic prediction. “ This indeed,”

says Barrow, "is the point, which invincibly guardeth and fortifieth all other testimonies." "Among all Christians," Bishop Burnet remarks, "the article of the resurrection and ascension of Christ was always looked upon as the capital one, upon which all the rest depended." Our Lord himself spoke of it as the decisive miracle; the only sign to be given to his incredulous countrymen, which malice itself could not ascribe to the potency of "the chief of the devils"—*an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.* Matt. xii. 39. These words lead me to notice what I consider to be a doubtful explanation of the *sign from heaven*, suggested by Bishop Porteus, and adopted by Mr. Hinds in his Catechist's Manual. They suppose it to have been the appearance of the Messiah with visible glory in the clouds of heaven, with the angels; as described by the prophet Daniel. But if this were the meaning of the Pharisees, they would hardly have expressed themselves in the words ascribed to them by St. Matthew, *Master, we would see a sign from thee, (σημεῖον, not τὸ σημεῖον,)* not any appearance of Christ himself, but an appearance, or portent, produced at his command. When the Jews asked him, *What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up* (John ii. 19.); and the Jews did not object to this answer, that such a sign would be no proof of his Messiahship; but only that it was beyond his power to perform it. The sign from heaven, which the Pharisees demanded, was some splendid appearance from the sky: the calling down of fire, as in the case of Elijah; some visible descent of heavenly glory upon Jesus; or some celestial voice. These signs were actually vouchsafed to the forerunner of Christ, and to his faithful followers, but were refused to his opponents. On another occasion the Jews intimated, that instead of miraculously multiplying earthly

food, Jesus ought to have brought it down for them from heaven, as Moses did. John vi. 30. (Vitringa, Obs. Sacr. II. 16.) The reason, why Jesus refused such a sign as they demanded, was not, as Bishop Porteus supposes, that his appearance in glory would have been inconsistent with his state of humiliation; for the Apostles who were present at the transfiguration did actually see him in glory; but because the Jews had resisted sufficient evidence, and would not believe without evidence of their own choosing. Our Lord probably knew that they would not have been induced to believe by *any* evidence. At all events, having perversely attributed the supernatural works of Jesus to the agency of evil spirits, they did not deserve that conviction should be forced upon them irresistibly.

P. 360. Dr. Burton, in the learned notes to his Bampton Lectures, p. 429, says, "It is no where asserted in the New Testament that we shall rise again *with our bodies*. Unless a man will say, that the stalk, the blade, and the ear of corn are actually the same thing with the single grain put into the ground, he cannot quote St. Paul as saying that we shall rise again with the same bodies: or at least he must allow, that the future body may only be like to the present one, inasmuch as both come under the same genus; *i. e.* we speak of human *bodies*, and we speak of the heavenly *bodies*: but St. Paul's words do not warrant us in saying that the resemblance will be greater than that between a man and a star, or between a bird and a fish." But the grain of corn contains the *germ*, at least, of the stalk, the blade, and the ear; and there is a more direct connexion between them, than between a bird and a fish. "The identity," says Bishop Pearson, "of the body raised from death is so necessary, that the very name of the resurrection doth include, or suppose it." This is the argument of Tertullian;

and of many of the Fathers, whose words are quoted by Suicer in his *Expositio Symboli Nicæo-Constantinopolitani*, p. 370. If we are not to rise again *with our bodies*, I do not understand how we can be said to rise *again* at all, as far as our bodies are concerned; nor how, if one body is buried, and another body, absolutely and totally different, and having nothing in common with the former body, is to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, it can be called a resurrection of the body. Nor can I reconcile this notion with Matt. xxvii. 52, *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of saints which slept, arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*<sup>9</sup> I think it probable that these saints were believers in Jesus Christ, who had not been long deceased; and that their bodies may not have been decomposed; and that after their appearance amongst the living, instead of returning to their resting places, to await the general resurrection, as was the case with Lazarus, their bodies may have been translated to heaven in a glorified state, as those of Elijah and of our blessed Lord were. The intent of the miracle seems to have been, to give an immediate and visible proof, that Jesus Christ, by rising from the dead, was *become the first fruits of them that slept*. And if so, the resurrection of these saints was of the same kind with that which will take place at the last day.

But it appears to me that St. Paul does actually assert the resurrection of *the body*. As I have observed in the Sermon, he says that the body which is buried shall be raised again,

<sup>9</sup> I do not lay much stress upon our Saviour's words, which are urged by Witsius in proof of a resurrection of the same body; *the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, &c.* John v. 28. But I think that there is great difficulty in his expression, *Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell, (Matt. x. 28.)* if we deny the resurrection of *the body*.

but having undergone a change. *So also is the resurrection of the dead. It (i. e. the body) is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption—it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.* With respect to those who shall be alive at that day, the Apostle does not say that they shall be clothed with *other* bodies, but that *this corruptible (body) must put on incorruption.* Again, Jesus Christ *shall change the appearance of our vile body (μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα) so that it shall be of the same form with his body of glory,<sup>9</sup> σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ.* The strongest apparent evidence for an entire difference of bodies is in 2 Cor. v. 1. *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven.* But nothing more can fairly be inferred from this, than that our future body will be different, as to its qualities, from that which we now have.

It was the belief of no common thinker, “that our estranged and divided ashes shall unite again : that our separated dust, after so many pilgrimages and transformations into the parts of minerals, plants, animals, elements, shall at the voice of God return into their primitive shapes, and join again to make up their primary and predestinate forms. As at the creation there was a separation of the confused mass into its species; so at the destruction thereof there shall be a separation into its distinct individuals—then shall appear the fertility of Adam, and the magic of that sperm that hath dilated into so many millions.” Sir T. Browne’s *Religio Medici*, Sect. 48. Upon the whole, I see no reason for departing from the doctrine of the early Church, and of our own, that we “shall rise again with our bodies,” as it is asserted in the Athanasian, and implied in the Apostles’ Creed, although we need not use that expression in the sense of asserting a

<sup>9</sup> Phil. iii. 21.



resurrection of the same numerical collection of parts. The Fathers indeed maintained the doctrine of a resurrection of the flesh, precisely and as numerically as it is buried; and the expression in the Apostles' Creed, as adopted by the Greek and Latin churches, is *σαρκὸς ἀνάστασις*, and *resurrectionem carnis*; in the Aquileian Creed, *hujus carnis*. Our own Church has altered this phrase into the safer form, "the resurrection of the body." And "it is to be observed," (says Lord King, in his History of the Creed, p. 403.) "that although the Fathers designed by this article to declare the resurrection of the selfsame body; yet they always understood that the qualities thereof should be changed and altered; that from mortal and corruptible it should become immortal and incorruptible;" or, as Barrow expresses it, "as the bodies of men shall be raised up the same in substance, so shall they be much altered in quality."—"Farewell they also, whiche do denye, that this selfsame body, whiche we do beare about with us, shall revive and lyve agayne, but do say that to every man shall be gyven another body much more excellent and better than this is. But we shal not be the same men, if we shal not receyve agayne the same bodyes. And I pray you what nede is it to create newe bodyes, whan God by his almyghty power is able to restore these same bodyes to most perfyght clarite and bryghtnesse, and also to blessed immortalite? not chaungynge the substance of the body: but chaungynge the qualities of the body into muche better." Erasmus's Expositio of the Crede, fol. 125. Thomas Burnet, in his Treatise De Statu Mortuorum et Resurgentium, after having rejected with contempt the popular notion of a numerical resurrection, proceeds somewhat inconsistently to maintain, that the just shall actually rise again with earthly bodies, at the first resurrection, ("cum redinduemur carnem, vel corpus carneum") which at the end of the Millennium are to be glorified in the second resurrection.

I see no difficulty in admitting that we shall be raised *with our bodies*, except that which arises from our ignorance of what constitutes bodily identity, where the body is one component part of a moral agent. Strictly speaking, it should seem that identity cannot be predicated of a body at two different times, if there be the slightest addition to, or diminution from the aggregate of its component particles. Yet we say, in common speech, that a man has the same body now which he had ten years ago; although the whole of his body has gone through a variety of successive changes in that time, and probably has little, if any thing, remaining of that which was its substance at the commencement of it. The same observation applies to all organized bodies. The mere interruption of life will not destroy bodily identity; for it is not denied that our Saviour took again the very same body which his spirit had left upon the cross. In the case of Lazarus, the process of disorganization had begun; many particles had been carried off in the form of effluvia: yet no one would say that Lazarus revived had not the same body as Lazarus before his death. Disorganization may destroy bodily identity, if it puts an end to the sensitive functions; but then a reunion of the same soul with its former body reorganized, with whatever change or modification, may be supposed to constitute it, morally speaking, the same body; as you would say of a man at two different periods of his life, that he is the same man, soul and body, although his body is in fact totally and entirely different, as to its component parts, at the two periods. Our bodies may undergo any kind of change which God may be pleased to work in them, and become what St. Paul terms *spiritual bodies*, (the nature of which we shall not know till we are clothed with them,) and retain, in some sense, their identity. "Although the very numerical body is not raised, yet the body is truly raised, because what is raised, being united to the soul, there will arise in the man, thus

completed, a consciousness of his identity." Macknight on 1 Cor. xv. 37. I think that there is great weight in some of the arguments urged by Tertullian, of whose Treatise *De Resurrectione Carnis*, a summary view is given by the Bishop of Lincoln, p. 272, &c. With respect to the resurrection of Christ, the same Father maintains, in a separate treatise, that he rose in the flesh; to prove which we need no other evidence than St. Luke xxiv. 39, *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* But that his body was made a heavenly, or spiritual body, as St. Paul terms it, at, or before his ascension, we know from the words of the same Apostle, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit* (or enter into) *the kingdom of heaven.* In another place he speaks of what Christ did *in the days of his flesh.* Heb. v. 7. The opinions of the Greek Fathers may be seen in Suicer, v. *Ἀνάστασις*, in his *Expositio Symboli Nic.* p. 267, and in Hody's *Treatise on the Resurrection of the same body.* They held, that our Saviour, upon rising again, took a glorified body, no longer liable to the imperfections of the human frame; and that he suffered himself to be handled, and partook of food *per συγκράβασιν.* Suicer, v. *Συγκράβασις*, p. 1071. So Witsius (*Exercit. in Symbol.* p. 298.) says that Christ veiled his glory for a season, after his resurrection, in condescension to the weakness of his disciples, who otherwise would not have been able to endure the splendour of his appearance. The doubtful speculations of Cudworth respecting the kind of body which Christ assumed after his resurrection, together with the judicious animadversions of Mosheim, may be seen in his *Second Vol.* p. 442, &c.

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## SERMON XXI.

P. 390. *Her first five Articles.*] I apprehend that when the eighth Article declares, that the three Creeds may be proved by Scripture, it is meant that the *doctrines* asserted in these Creeds may be so proved. Now the damnatory clauses, as they are called, are certainly no part of the Christian doctrine which it is the express object of the Creed to set forth, nor even, strictly speaking, part of the Creed itself; but a particular form of asserting that the belief of the doctrine therein set forth, is necessary to salvation. If to the Apostles' Creed were to be subjoined some such clause as the following, "This is the true Catholic faith," no one would look upon it as a part of the Creed; nor consider it to be of a damnatory nature; and yet such an assertion would *imply* an inference, that the belief of the Creed is necessary to salvation. But it is to be remarked that such a clause, as well as the objectionable clauses in the Athanasian Creed, is *declaratory* only, and not *judicial*. It is not said, as it is by the Church of Rome, of all who deny her dogmas and canons, *anathema sit*, let him be cast out, but, "without doubt" (*i. e.* we learn from Scripture that,) "he who will not receive this Scripture doctrine, will perish everlastingly." How careful the Church of England is to abstain from all *uncharitable* declarations, appears from the Communion service; where, instead of the imprecatory form of the Mosaic denunciations, *Cursed be he, &c.* (as it stands in our received version), is used the declaratory, *Cursed is he.*

Further it may be observed, of the expression in the eighth Article, "are *thoroughly* to be received," that the latin is, "*omnino* recipienda sunt;" are *by all means* to be received.

The Bishops and others, who were commissioned in 1689 to revise the Liturgy, unanimously agreed to insert in the

rubric before the Athanasian Creed, the following words: "And the condemning clauses are to be understood as relating only to those, who obstinately deny the subsistence of the Christian faith." This was done out of consideration for many of the non-conformists, who had scruples about the clauses in question, but who did not object to the Creed on any other account. Baxter declared; "In a word, the damnable sentences excepted, or modestly expounded, I embrace the Creed, commonly called Athanasius's, as the best explication of the Trinity." Waterland, Vol. IV. p. 307, from whose account it appears, that the Commissioners had at one time drawn up a scheme, in which it was proposed to leave every minister at liberty with respect to the use of this Creed; but upon more mature consideration they came to this conclusion; to require the reading of the Creed as before (but only six times in the year) with the qualifying rubric. The inconveniences of the former suggestion are too obvious to require enforcement. Another expedient was proposed in 1794, by Dr. Pearson, the late excellent Master of Sidney Sussex College, viz. to throw out the condemning clauses, and to retain the doctrines; which Dr. Hey considers to be not an impracticable plan, if desirable on the whole. The present Bishop of Peterborough observes; "Though I argue against the *inferences* deduced from the anathemas of the Athanasian Creed, I do not mean to defend those anathemas. They are no part of the Creed itself. And though such anathemas were not uncommon in ancient Creeds, they might have been rejected from the Athanasian Creed, when it was adopted by our Reformers." Comparative View of the Churches of England and Rome, p. 187. "A second rule to be observed in the interpretation of the Articles is this: where there are any general positions contained in, or referred to and confirmed by the Articles, which cannot be received but under certain restrictions and limitations, those restrictions and

limitations ought to be made and received ; just in the same manner as we receive many absolute declarations in the Scriptures themselves, which no one ever understands or interprets but under proper restrictions and explanations.”—“The same principle has a claim to be admitted in determining the sense of those clauses in the Athanasian Creed, which make the catholic faith, as therein explained, necessary to salvation. It cannot be necessary in those who have not capacity and abilities to understand the intention and meaning of it. The clauses have a respect, as the whole creed has, to those, who, by explaining away the divinity and incarnation of Christ, subverted the very foundation of Christianity, which is laid in the doctrines of atonement and redemption. Nor does the sentence of condemnation reach even those, who might possibly not perceive the evil tendency and consequence of their errors.” Archdeacon Tottie's Charges, p. 379. He says, however, in a note ; “There are many reasons why the Athanasian Creed should be retained by our Articles ; but I never could see the propriety of its having been introduced into our Liturgy.” With regard to the sentiments of some of our most distinguished divines, as to this Creed, I shall only observe, that when Archbishop Tillotson expressed to Bishop Burnet his wish that we were well rid of it, he had in view, not his own scruples, but those of the dissenters, and others who were offended by the condemning clauses ; and that Bishop Tomline's objection to these clauses, as being inconsistent with the general mildness and toleration of the Church of England, is in a great measure answered by himself, when he observes, “that if a man, through obstinacy and prejudice, from a wilful misapplication or neglect of the talents with which he is endowed, finally rejects the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, when they are fairly and fully proposed to him, he has no right to expect salvation.” That in this sense, and in this sense only, the clauses have been

adopted by our Church, we ought surely to infer from her conspicuous and acknowledged moderation in all her Articles and Formularies. I agree with Dr. Hey, a divine than whom few men have been less dogmatical, none more charitable, that "a mind, not tinctured with superstition, or religious fear, will be able to supply such rational limitations to the general threatenings of our Creed, as to judge them harmless in all situations, and useful in many; that their tendency is, when terror does not discompose the judgment, to make men *prove all things*, and not to accept even the doctrines of the Creed itself implicitly, lest, in accepting any thing erroneous, they should eventually reject the truth." Lectures, Vol. III. p. 112. He adds, in p. 116, "I suspect that many of those who are so impatient about it, secretly favour a change in the doctrines of the Church; and are, at bottom, adverse to the Creed, because it is so impregnable. With regard to the condemning clauses, they seem so little difficult to *me*, that I am scarce a judge what should be done. Some alterations they might admit; but I think the explanation now given, both of them and the doctrines, such as, by proper language, might be made intelligible even to the people." I think so too; and I think that it is the duty of the Clergy to give such explanation to their congregations, and to teach them in what sense the Church asserts the danger of unbelief. I am persuaded that the disrepute, into which this formulary has been brought, is to nothing more owing, than to its habitual omission by many of the parochial Clergy. Its regular use, accompanied by periodical explanations, would have, in a great degree, obviated objections. "Upon us, the ministers of the Church, especially, it is incumbent, as occasions offer, to explain and illustrate its design and uses to the more unlearned, as well as to obviate the crude exceptions made against its doctrines or its language; to derive its due weight of authority

from the venerable antiquity of its origin ;<sup>10</sup> and to draw an argument of its merits from the universal approbation with which it has been received, and from the place which it now holds in the Confession, if not in the Liturgy, of every Church in Europe, papal and reformed; from no one of which it could be removed, without authorizing, on the part of that Church, a presumption that its doctrines were erroneous." Bishop Cleaver, Sermons, p. 147. How far it might be expedient to remove the Athanasian Creed from the Liturgy, to the Confession, of our Church, is a question upon which I will not now enter: but I must repeat my persuasion, that to those, who do not stumble at its doctrines, its language, as adopted by our Church, may be so explained, as to leave no just ground of offence. "And if doubt and perplexity were settled by some authoritative and received limitations, I should expect it to be admired generally by those, who resigned their minds to its *doctrines*." Dr. Hey, p. 117.

These remarks have been made, upon the supposition that the condemning clauses were originally directed against those who did not receive the catholic faith according to that particular exposition, which is contained in the Athanasian Creed. Dr. Miller however has observed, that the Creed comprises two distinct propositions, which have been confounded into one; that the belief of the catholic, or Christian faith, is necessary to salvation; and that the exposition of the Creed does justly represent that catholic or true faith; and he contends that the denunciations refer to the former proposition, not to the latter. That in this spirit they are used by the Church of England I am fully persuaded; but I must confess my doubts, whether such was their original intent.

<sup>10</sup> But upon this ground it does not possess the same claims to respect with the other two creeds; not having been received into the Western Church before the twelfth century, and never into the Eastern.



But I strongly recommend a perusal of Dr. Miller's Observations, as well of Dr. Waterland's and Dr. Hey's remarks on the Athanasian Creed. See also Selden's Table Talk, *Creeds*.

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SERMON XXII.

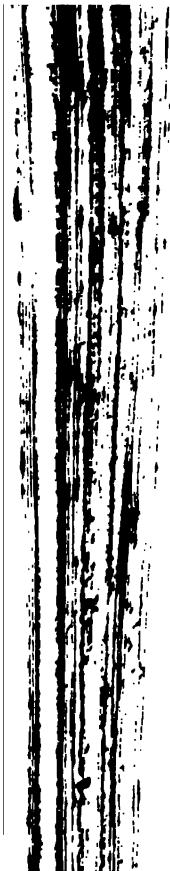
P. 398. *Admitting of modification.*] “ So likewise in Church matters, the substance of doctrine is immutable ; and so are the general rules of government : but for rites and ceremonies, and for the particular hierarchies, policies and disciplines of Churches, they be left at large.—In these things, so as the general rules be observed ; that Christ's flock be fed ; that there be a succession in Bishops and Ministers, which are the prophets of the New Testament ; that there be a due and reverent use of the power of the keys ; that those that preach the Gospel, live of the Gospel ; that all things tend to edification ; that all things be done in order and with decency, and the like : the rest is left to the holy wisdom and spiritual discretion of the master builders and inferior builders in Christ's Church ; as it is excellently alluded to by that Father that noted, that Christ's garment was without seam ; and yet the Church's garment was of divers colours ; and thereupon setteth down for a rule ; *in veste varietas sit, scissura non sit.*” Lord Bacon, of the Pacification of the Church. Works, Vol. III. p. 150.

P. 403. *Choice of guides.*] “ We see in civil societies, even of the freest kind, however the people may have reserved to themselves the supreme legislative authority, yet

the ordinary administration of government is committed either to a prince or a senate. By a like delegation of power, either single men, or small bodies of men, may and must be authorized to govern the Church: to them must be committed the care of choosing fit persons for discharging the offices of religion; and from them we may reasonably expect a much wiser and safer choice, than from the caprice and folly of every particular congregation." Dr. Balguy, Disc. VI. p. 86. The congregation which elects, or calls a person to be their minister, as in the case of Unitarian ordination, so named, are of course the judges of his fitness for the office; and have power to displace him, if he be not compliant with their humour. "The people, through affection or want of judgment, are easily brought by ambitious persons to give their consent to unworthy men: they are soon moved by the request of their friends, and of such as they either fear or love, to do any thing; as may appear in sundry things committed unto them of great importance: yea sometime, when by their oath they are bound to deal without affection or partialitie. By this meanes they would thinke to have their pastor bound unto them, so that they would take it disdainefully to be reproved by him, according as his duetie would require. Againe the pastor, considering their goodwill in preferring of him, woulde not so freely reprehend them, nor willingly displease them. These and a great number mo reasons may be alleadged, why the people are to be secluded from the election of their pastors: and yet do I not so utterly seclude them from suche elections, but that if they have any thing to object against him that is to be ordeyned, they might be heard: which order is prescribed in the booke of making ministers; and that is as much as can be required. Although I do not condemne those Churches, wherein this is safely committed unto them: for I only speake of the present estate of this Church of England."

Whitgift's Defence of the Answer to the Admonition, p. 215. The following is Baxter's determination ;—"The power of ordaining belongeth not, 1. to Magistrates, 2. or to private men, either single, or as the body of a Church ; but, 3. to the Senior Pastors of the Church (whether Bishops or Presbyters of a distinct order, the reader must not expect that I here determine.) For, 1. The power is by Christ given unto them, as is before proved. 2. None else are ordinarily *able* to discern aright the abilities of a man for the sacred ministry. The people may discern a profitable, moving preacher : but whether he understand the Scripture, or the substance of religion, or be sound in the faith, and not heretical, and delude them not with a form of well uttered words, they are not ordinarily able to judge. 3. None else are fit to *attend* this work, but pastors who are separated to the sacred office. It requireth more time to get fitness for it, and then to perform it faithfully, than either magistrates or people can ordinarily bestow. 4. The power is no where given by Christ to magistrates or people. 5. It hath been *exercised* by pastors, or Church-officers *only*, both in, and ever since the Apostles' days, in all the Churches of the world. And we have no reason to think that the Church hath been gathered from the beginning till now, by so great an error, as a wrong conveyance of the ministerial power." Christian Directory, Part III. p. 100. I have quoted these passages from two writers of widely different sentiments with respect to Church-government, as expressing very clearly and succinctly some important principles, which may safely and charitably be insisted upon by the Clergy, and which will be admitted by many of the laity, who dispute that higher title, upon the authority of which we claim their attention and respect.

FINIS.



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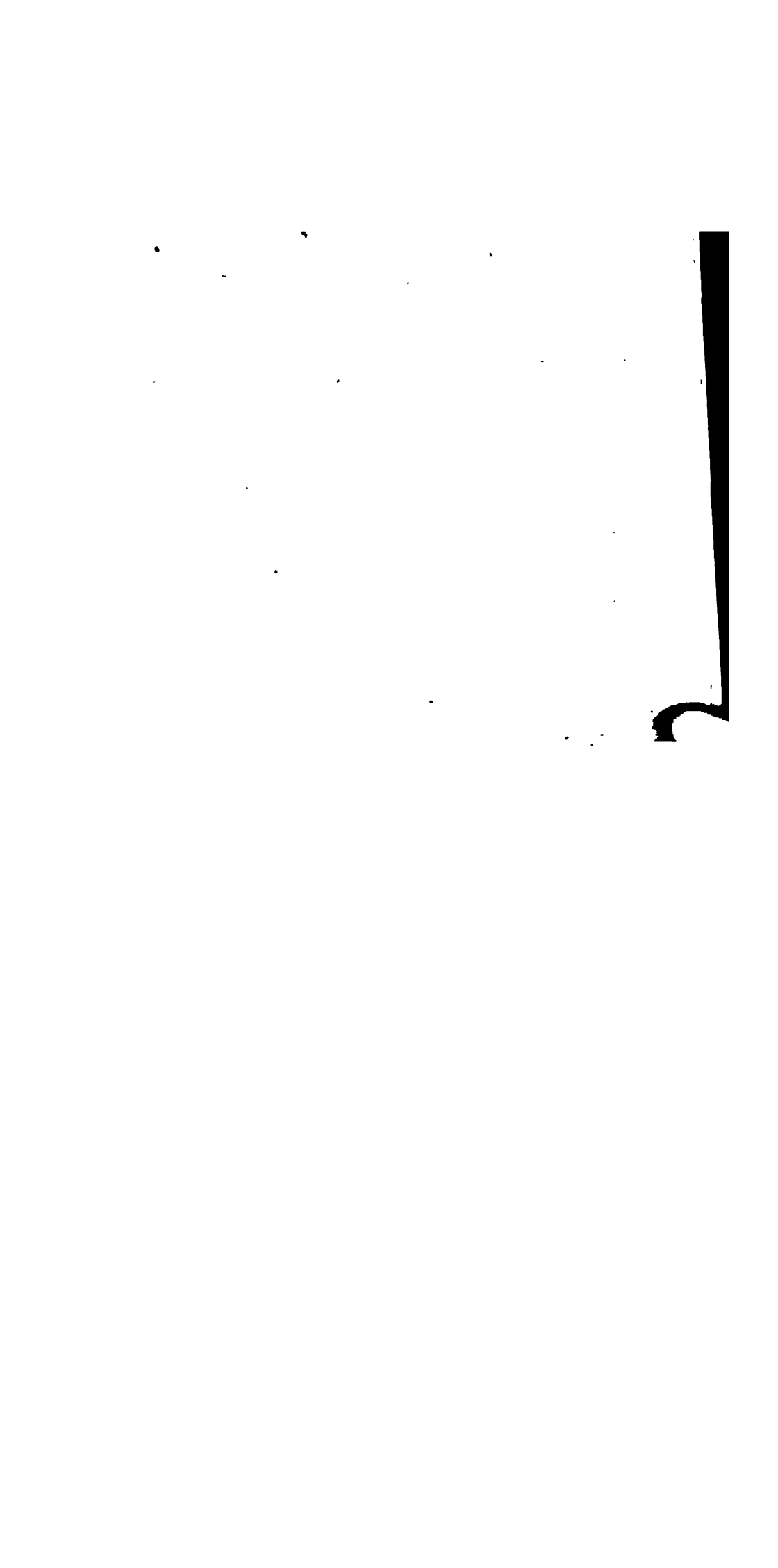
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